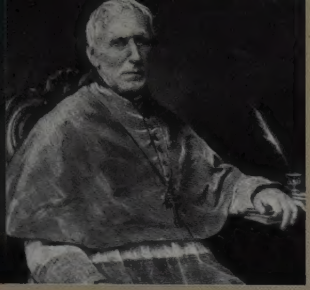

The Archbishops of TUAM

1700–2000

KIERAN WALDRON

From the period a century before Catholic Emancipation to the present day, this story covers the life and times, the struggles and characters, of the sixteen Archbishops of Tuam who led the diocese over the past these three hundred years.

While the name of Archbishop John McHale will be especially remembered, many of the other archbishops have, unfairly, been almost forgotten. Each one did a service to the Church and to society in their time. New insights are provided into the humanity of these churchmen, especially through the controversies and struggles in which they were engaged.

FRONT COVER:
Pictures of 19th and 20th century archbishops.
Archbishops Oliver Kelly, John McHale, John MacEvilly, and the broken wheel symbol of St Jarlath.
Archbishops John Healy, Thomas Gilmartin, Joseph Walsh, and view of Croagh Patrick.
Archbishops Joseph Cunnane, Joseph Cassidy, Michael Neary, and his episcopal crest.

REAR COVER:
The Cross of Cong,
(courtesy of The National Museum of Ireland).

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The Archbishops of TUAM

1700–2000

KIERAN WALDRON

To Tom Hall
+ Michael Neary
Archbishop of Tuam
19th Oct 2011

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Kieran Waldron.

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INTRODUCTION

Lives of great men all remind us
We can make our lives sublime
And, departing, leave behind us,
Footprints on the sands of Time.

H.W. Longfellow: *A Psalm of Life*

When I look at my grandfather Waldron's headstone in Ballyhaunis cemetery, I am given a lesson in history. He died in 1901, aged 72. That means he was born in the year of Catholic Emancipation of 1829, a span of just three generations. Surely a lesson of the shortness of two hundred years and of the continuity of history, in spite of enormous change!

Our story covers those two hundred years of the successive Catholic Archbishops of Tuam — and as a backdrop and a further exercise in continuity — a shorter account of the eighteenth century archbishops, in the hundred years before Emancipation.

When compiling a previous book, *The Archdiocese of Tuam: An Illustrated History*, I came to realise the enormous diversity of character and the heroic struggles of many of those archbishops. In that publication the limitations of space were so constricting that the treatment of their character and achievements could not do justice to them. Some of them were so famous that they will never be forgotten but others, I dare to hope, will be now be made more memorable as a result of the short biographies below.

Older biographies of bishops and archbishops tended to the hagiographical - extolling their sublime and heroic qualities. As a result they often fail to portray an essential human dimension – that of fallibility and imperfections. The modern approach to bishops, on the other hand, may tend to the opposite extreme, focussing rather on their faults and failings. Neither does justice to their subjects. If one glosses over the controversies, the human failings and the ordinary

frustrations and foibles which afflict us all, the humanity of the subject is lost and something less than an adequate service is done to the truth, and to the wider story of the Church in its many struggles.

I have been fortunate to have had access to much new material and many illuminating documents, published here for the first time. Documentary evidence of the lives of the pre-Emancipation bishops is sparse but surviving personal documents of later bishops are especially valuable. What might have been intended as merely personal letters, on matters merely ephemeral can provide a wonderful insight for us today. Letter-writing was the only means of communication to a distant colleague, opponent or friend, so the concern expressed, whether it was anger, frustration or self-satisfaction provides, in a lasting format, a true snapshot of a character. Indeed, with the reduction in use of the personal letter in our own time because of the easier access to the unrecorded telephone call, our modern age and its people may, perhaps, be more difficult to comprehend in future ages.

The lives of archbishops may seem to be remote from the everyday life of the ordinary individual. Their influence, nevertheless, is profound, so the stories of such men are of constant interest to people. The great church-personalities described here were very different in nature and in grace. They were nonetheless all gifted individuals who did a service to Church and people in their time in the archdiocese of Tuam.

The Selection of Bishops

I might here assist the reader by providing a short note on the appointment process of bishops and archbishops. The office of Bishop is central to the faithful service of God's people. So when a vacancy arises in a diocese, the matter of the selection of a person to fill the position is a matter of great moment. Candidates passed over, who were seriously considered, might indeed have guided the church in a diocese in a different direction but their names will be omitted in the pages of diocesan history. For the ones chosen there is the assurance of Christ: I chose you and I commissioned you, to go out and bear fruit, fruit that will last.(John 15: 16)

The church is an institution that is very human but, in the checks and balances that are used in these decisions, it is indeed guided, in some way or other, by the Holy Spirit. As in other institutions, several people may be involved in the process of decision-making but the final decision is eventually the responsibility

of a select group within the Roman Curia. Until 1909, this group was the Sacred Congregation of *Propaganda Fide*. Thereafter it became the responsibility of the Congregation of Bishops.

Those who have the responsibility of making the choice of a new bishop face the task with a spirit of commitment to the good of the church but, inevitably, human factors enter in. Thankfully however, these responsible are normally directed by the highest of motives and a good choice is eventually made.

In the 18th century, appointments were made after a series of 'postulations' to Rome from within the diocese or from other interested parties. In the 19th century, and indeed until 1918, whenever a vacancy occurred in a diocese, a well-flagged meeting of parish priests was held to select a panel of three names to be sent to the Holy See. In the case of a bishop still in office who was unable to carry out his duties because of age or ill-health, the practice was somewhat different. In such instances, the process would be initiated, normally, by the bishop himself. He would formally request that an Auxiliary bishop would be assigned to himself personally. In these instances, the wishes of the person in office were frequently given much weight, but it is a principle strongly asserted by Rome that the final decision on the choice is a matter for the Holy See.

If, however, a co-adjutor bishop, one with right of succession on the death or retirement of the incumbent, was to be appointed, much wider implications would be considered. In this case the wishes of the incumbent would have lesser value. Tuam, as the Metropolitan See for the province, would always be somewhat different to other dioceses because the transfer of an existing bishop to Tuam would always be a possibility. Many archbishops of Tuam were, in fact, previously suffragan bishops in another of the dioceses of the West. Hence, in Tuam, there has always existed a lesser sense of freedom by the 'electors' of Tuam in proposing a successor.

Nowadays, episcopal appointments go almost without comment. But the level of public controversy which accompanied the choosing of bishops in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was such that it makes all the more remarkable the quiet acquiescence of priests and people to the highly secretive appointment system in operation for most of the twentieth century.

As we shall see later, the controversial appointment of one of the suffragan

bishops became a notorious event when a Coadjutor to Archbishop McHale was being considered in 1878. The person eventually selected was Bishop Mac Evilly of Galway, a former priest of the archdiocese, but a man not loved or favoured by Dr McHale. The appointment and the accession was heralded by four years of controversy between them, much of it very public. It is described below in some detail and could form a cautionary tale for modern times, or into the future.

The 19th century system of selection by parish priests during a vacancy of a *terna* of possible candidates undoubtedly had its merits in that the needs and knowledge of the local church were well considered, but it sometimes had unfortunate side-effects because of the generating of public controversy and division. No wonder then that the 1918 Code of Canon Law removed the right to these diocesan elections, preceding or during a vacancy. From then on all appointments of bishops and archbishops were somewhat shrouded in secrecy.

After 1918 the practice was that the reigning bishop was obliged, every three years, to consult the members of the diocesan Chapter and a few of the '*prudentiores*', the more prudent of priests outside the Chapter. These consultations were carried out in writing, under secrecy and on a one-to-one basis. When the several dioceses had carried out such a consultation, the bishops of the province were then obliged to meet and draw up a list of priests considered suitable for the episcopacy in the event of a vacancy in the province.

The method of voting at the bishops' meetings was itself strictly controlled. After some initial discussion, each bishop present voted in secret behind a screen, through a quaint system of allocating a specific coloured ball in favour of a particular candidate. The use of a black ball was said to be equivalent to a veto. The resulting list of three candidates according to merit, the *terna,* was to be sent to the Holy See. This list was available then to the authorities whenever a vacancy occurred within the province.

The New Code of Canon Law in 1983 incorporated further refinements in procedure, which had gradually come into use since 1950. Now the Papal Delegate or Nuncio was to seek individually the suggestions of the Metropolitans and the suffragan bishops of each Province. He was also authorised to hear the view of some members of the diocesan consultors, the diocesan Chapter and other '*prudentiores*'. This was without prejudice to the right of every bishop individually to make known to the Apostolic See the names of priests who, he

thought, were worthy and suitable for the episcopal office. In practice, the process was broadened somewhat over time whereby, during a vacancy, the Apostolic Nuncio consulted on a one-to-one basis a random sample of priests and laity. Each recipient of the consultation letter was bound to absolute secrecy—a 'pontifical secret', with grave ecclesiastical penalties, if anything was divulged.

As the new process gained ground and the role of the Apostolic Nuncio increased, the system became more and more secretive and centralised. Older priests might consider it better than the unworthy public methods employed in the previous century but such a secretive system does leave itself open during the process to the possibility of manipulation or interference by one or more persons who are in a position of power, either to advance the claims of a favoured candidate or to block the possibility of somebody who might be very worthy. When this is known to happen, it leaves diocesan priests, who have given a lifetime of service to the Church and who are more aware of the particular diocesan needs, with a sense of nothingness and frustration.

Nevertheless the decrease in influence of diocesan priests in episcopal appointments was accepted almost without question for at least the first sixty years of the twentieth century, a time of extreme deference to authority in all spheres of society. In church circles, an increase in Papal power since 1870 coincided with this trend and, with more modern communications, the Holy See became more and more in touch with the doings of local churches. The appointment of a resident Papal Nuncio to the new Irish State in 1929 also increased central control. Thereafter there grew a sense of Irish church affairs being increasingly monitored by Rome - especially in the matter of episcopal appointments. It is therefore no surprise that as the century ended, the system of episcopal appointments did give rise to some disquiet throughout the Church and particularly among diocesan clergy.

THE ARCHBISHOPS OF THE 18th CENTURY PENAL DAYS

A Brief Account

The following short accounts of the appointments of archbishops of Tuam in the 18th century are included here as a sort of backdrop to enable the reader to assess more fully the subsequent archbishops who followed them and the radical changes which they faced in their leading the Church of Tuam in the two hundred years 1800- 2000. Understandably, from Penal times, few documentary records are available so the author must acknowledge the masterful work of the 19th century historian, Oliver J Burke, for his *History of the Catholic Archbishops of Tuam*, published in Dublin in 1882. He gave an account of the various archbishops from the setting up of the archdiocese in 1152 until the lifetime of Archbishop John McHale.

In the constant inter-action over the centuries between the local church and the central authority in Rome the pattern has steadily moved towards more centralised control. In the 18th century Rome had to rely for local information on the Catholic nobility, the priests, and whatever bishops could remain in residence in the country. Because of the hostile environment to Catholics at that time, Ireland was treated by Rome in matters of church government as akin to a mission territory. It is no surprise therefore that ultimate control over Irish church affairs, including bishops' appointments, was exercised by the Sacred Congregation of *Propaganda Fide*. (SCPF), the congregation which had responsibility for all mission territories. The Catholic Church in Ireland had been deprived of its lands. Its bishops were often in exile and the pastoral work of priests of the ground was much inhibited. There was no Papal Nuncio to Ireland. Formal contacts with Rome tended to be through the Papal Nunciature in Brussels and through personal contacts in Rome. The Penal Laws were at their

height and, for instance, until the very end of that century no Catholic Archbishops found it safe to hold a residence in Tuam itself.

In the selection process for the seven archbishops of Tuam appointed within the 18th century, *Propaganda* records contain up to twelve long petitions or postulations, mostly from the Tuam clergy, sometimes co-signed by members of the laity, some from members of the nobility and some from the bishops of the province. The office of bishop then was an even more unenviable task than it is today.

The official petitions are of enormous interest because of the self-assured way in which the petitioners expressed the local opinion, despite the adverse conditions they had to endure in their own ministry in Ireland. They are also noteworthy because of the arguments adduced in favour of particular candidates. To modern sensibilities, to propose an individual because he 'belonged to a noble family' would certainly be distasteful. But recommendations on such grounds were frequent. However, in those times, it was often a matter not so much of snobbery, as of sheer pragmatism. It was recognised that the office of a bishop was not of itself self-supporting. So, if a candidate had independent means, or at least the financial help of a landed family, then this was an enormous advantage. Coupled with that was the consideration that a member of the Catholic aristocracy, such as it was, was more likely to be on good terms with his Protestant compeers, and it was felt, because of this influence, that the full rigours of penal laws still on the statute book might be somewhat mitigated.

We are indebted to Fr Hugh Fenning OP who has assembled twelve of these petitions, or postulations, dating from 1712 to 1809, from the archives of *Propaganda Fide* and the Dominican house of San Clemente in Rome. He has made them easily accessible in the journal *Collectanea Hibernica, I997-98.*

Most of the candidates proposed in the petitions were in fact eventually appointed. These were, of course, priests who had the enormous advantage of a university and seminary education received in the Irish Colleges on the Continent. Many of them possessed doctorates in theology or canon law. Some had been Rectors of the Irish Colleges themselves. In this they differed from the bishops of the 19th and 20th centuries who were, almost without exception, graduates of the 'Royal Catholic College of Maynooth', a college established in 1795 under a British Act of Parliament.

Appointment of Archbishop Francis Burke, 1714–23

In 1712, the exiled Archbishop James Lynch, who had ruled for forty-two years, asked for a co-adjutor. He had been living in refuge for most of his reign in Madrid and parts of France, principally at the Irish College in Paris. Only because of his exile did he escape the fate of his contemporary, St Oliver Plunkett of Armagh, who was martyred in 1681. Whenever the climate of oppression diminished, Lynch returned occasionally to his archdiocese, living mostly at Clonbur. Now an old man, he had hoped that his nephew, who had acted as Vicar-General for over twenty years during his absence, might now be selected

In a formal petition from the diocese to Rome in 1712, the petitioners representing twenty-eight parish priests and other clerics signed the petition. They offered two names: that of Dr Dominic Lynch, the Vicar General and a nephew of the deceased archbishop, and a Fr Francis Burke, who they said, had 'the support of the Earl of Clanricarde'. Dr Lynch, they said, was outstanding for his high birth, orthodoxy, zeal and experience during twenty-six years of his missionary career. Their alternate choice was Dr Francis Burke, a companion of Dr Lynch, and his claim was, they said, 'equal in merit'.

One must be amazed at the determination of these petitioners who somehow came together to make their views known. These men had been persecuted in various waves of persecution that had plagued the Irish Catholics during their ministry. Some of the priests were in an illegal status. They had not formally registered as 'Popish priests', as they were required to do by an Act of 1703 and had not taken the required oath of abjuration of any future Stuart king. The list includes various religious, including the abbot of Mayo Abbey, all of whom were, technically, banished from the country.

One of their choices, Dr Dominic Lynch, died shortly afterwards and in the event, Dr Francis Burke, their second choice, was appointed by Rome. He succeeded as archbishop on the death of Archbishop James Lynch a year later, in 1714. It is interesting to note that after the news was announced, the Stuart Pretender to the throne formally protested to the 'Cardinal Protector for Ireland' that he had not been consulted about the appointment.

Dr Francis Burke was consecrated secretly '*in refugio nostro*', a hideaway place somewhere in the diocese. At least Dr Burke had fared better than his

predecessor, Dr Lynch. The latter had had to make his way to Ghent in Belgium in 1669 to be consecrated in its cathedral there, as no bishops were available in Ireland at the time to perform the consecration.

Dr Burke remained as archbishop for nine years until he died in 1723.[1] Though reports at the time suggested some signs of normality being re-established, like friars returning to Ireland and unregistered priests celebrating Mass, little enough is recorded about these years of persecution, as secrecy was so essential for the administration of the church. The new archbishop had for many years the experience of moving furtively from place to place throughout the diocese, adopting various disguises and assumed names.

The will of Francis Burke gives his address as Knockatagle, Co Galway and indicates that his place of burial was to be Clonberne or 'as my friends shall order'. He died in 1723.

Archbishop Bernard O'Gara 1724–40.

A postulation found in the archives of Westminster Archdiocese, dated 26 June 1723, says the canons of the diocese unanimously asked His Holiness Pope Innocent XIII to appoint Dr Bernard O'Gara, parish priest of Bekan and Annagh and then vicar-capitular, following the death of Dr Francis Burke. The O'Gara family originally came from the east of the barony of Costello in Co Mayo but were displaced and moved to the barony of Coolavin, Co Sligo, where they built their castle near the re-named Lough O'Gara. Cromwellites later despoiled them of this homestead as well, but the O'Garas remained in that area. Farrell O'Gara, grandfather of the archbishop was one of the principal patrons of the Four Masters in their colossal project the *Annals of the Kingdom of Ireland*.

The petition of 1723 carried the signatures of twenty-six parish priests, twenty-one other priests and, amazingly to our modern sensibilities, the names of one hundred and forty members of 'the nobility'. They recommended Dr Bernard O'Gara. He is described as coming from 'an ancient Catholic family, learned, pious and an experienced and indefatigable administrator' and a graduate of the Jesuit Fathers in Douai. For the past fourteen years he had shown great zeal as rector, visitator and vicar-general. His nomination, they believed, would prevent the persecution of the clergy, which they feared, would follow the appointment of any newcomer to the diocese.[2]

Dr Bernard O'Gara was appointed archbishop on 27 December 1723.[3] When he came to be consecrated by Dr O'Kelly, Bishop of Elphin, the following May, the venue was not disclosed - simply '*in loco refugii nostro*' – in our place of refuge, presumably some 'safe house' within the diocese in the age of the priest-hunters! In his lifetime he was frequently threatened with arrest, so much so that he never signed documents as archbishop. The utmost he could do with safety was to sign them as A.T (Archbishop of Tuam). Warrants were being issued constantly to apprehend him. However he continued to move about the diocese, often in disguise, and known under the name Mr George Fowler[4].

A notorious event in his lifetime was the apostasy of Lord Athenry (de Birmingham) in 1726. Archbishop O'Gara issued a letter of condemnation but the letter found its way to the hands of the authorities and Dr O'Gara was pursued as a criminal. However he evaded arrest.

A notorious spy of the age, one Stratford Eyre, gives us a glimpse of the conditions in Archbishop O'Gara's diocese c. 1726.

He reported:

> One Brien Garah is reputed to be the Popish Archbishop of Tuam and, accordingly, to exercise ecclesiastical jurisdiction. My cause of knowledge hereof (beside public fame) is that of one Murphy, who acknowledged himself an Augustinian Friar, and had the assurance to apply to me to use my interest with the same Brien Garah to restore him, the said Murphy, to his benefice (of which he had been deprived by the said Garah) and to the liberty of teaching school.

Evidently, in selecting an advocate to help his restoration, the poor, dispossessed Friar and teacher did not realise he had chosen. as his protector the spy, Stratford –Eyre.

Eyre also reported on the activities of a priest in Dunmore, one Thady Glynn, to the Protestant Archbishop Synge, in 1726:—

> Parish of Dunmore, Tuam.
>
> May it please your Grace,
>
> This enclosed packet and a couple of guns found in ye house of Thady Glen, preest of

ye parish of Dunmore, who teaches Philosophy and Humanity in his Mass house, and boards some gentlemen's children who are under his care,

I am, with the utmost respect,

Stratford Eyre, Garbally.

The result was a Resolution of the House of Lords in 1731, that because 'Bernard O'Gara, the reputed Popish Archbishop of Tuam, hath by a letter, dated the 6th June 1726, written to the Right Honourable Lord Athenry', insolently and scandalously misrepresented his Lordship, that the Sergeant-at-Arms now be ordered 'to take the said Bernard O'Gara and Thady Glynn into custody.'

Another Protestant Bishop of Tuam, Dr Vesey, who lived at Hollymount, Co Mayo and whose daughter married Bingham of Castlebar, forefather of the Earls of Lucan, became alarmed at the increasing growth of Popery and reported to the House of Lords as follows:

> Bernard O'Gara is the reputed Popish Archbishop of Tuam and there are within his dominion seventy-five old Mass houses, twelve friaries, three nunneries and thirty two Popish schools, fifty-seven priests wherein, I think, grammar is taught. There are several private chapels and Masses often said in private houses. There, young men, under canonical age, are often ordained and then go to into foreign countries to prosecute their studies and come back as missionaries; whereby the number of priests is greatly increased. The number of nuns is not known.

Local tradition in, what is now, the parish of Bekan says that Archbishop O'Gara lived in a farmhouse in the townland of Carrowmacintire, near Tulrahan, where there was a small chapel. Until 1892 this portion of the parish was in the parish of Annagh, now Ballyhaunis. He certainly had close associations with the Augustinian Friary in nearby Ballyhaunis. A plaque in the now disused abbey church is in memory of his father, Charles O'Gara. It was also to be the resting-place of the archbishop after his death.

Towards the end of Bernard O'Gara's episcopate some division was apparent in the diocese. A petition mostly from Co Galway-based priests to Pope Clement XII, dated 28 August 1738, spoke of some intrigue by four priests of the diocese who were furtively canvassing for their appointment as delegates, or ecclesiastical judges, in place of a diocesan synod which they said was then impossible

'for fear of persecution'. They added that the four priests were not even graduates. Two of them, they said, were 'overly attached to our archbishop' and all four 'lived in the countryside, far from expert advice'. This postulation, now in the Archives of San Clemente in Rome, was signed by seventeen parish priests and rectors. [5]

A similar long-running dispute took place between the Archdiocese and the rectors of the abbeys of Cong and Mayo, which claimed back certain traditional parishes then being annexed from the jurisdiction of the abbeys by the reigning archbishop.[6] Even in the depths of persecution and lack of stability in the church, concerns so legalistic still occupied the minds of the clergy.

Archbishop Michael O'Gara, 1740–49

In April 1740, on the death of Bernard O'Gara, a petition recommending Dr Mark Skerrett as his successor was signed by a number of religious throughout the country. It was also supported by four of the parish priests, fifty-four laymen, and several other priests from the western province. They stated that this name had been forwarded by the better part of the chapter and parish priests of Tuam already. Another postulation in San Clemente archives, emanating from the Irish College in Alcala, Spain, was signed on June 28 1740 by many Dominicans and residents of that college in favour of Dr Michael O'Gara, who had been their rector for twelve years. Dr O'Gara's strengths, according to the signatories, were that he was 'of noble and orthodox parents, a man of merit in doctrine and good morals'. They said he was a more worthy candidate than anybody they knew.

Michael O'Gara was, in fact, a brother of the deceased archbishop. His appointment by the new Pope in September 1740, therefore, was something unique in our history. Surprisingly little is known, however, of the details of his episcopate

As archbishop, he lived his life mostly in hiding. He had the task of formally promulgating and implementing the decrees of the two-hundred-years-old Council of Trent in the archdiocese. However, he continued the dispute of his predecessor with the Abbots of Cong and Mayo Abbey and apparently, became even more intransigent in his opposition to their claims. In such disputes, appeals to Rome were then handled by the Nuncio in Brussels. One of these appeals claimed that the 'new archbishop' constantly disregarded the Nuncio's letters and injunctions.

Archbishop Mark Skerett, 1749 - 85

Michael O'Gara's nine years reign was to be one of the shortest in the history of the diocese. Dr Mark Skerrett, the other candidate on that occasion was later nominated for the see of Killala.

When Michael O'Gara died in 1749, a postulation was submitted recommending the appointment of Dr Robert Kirwan PP Annaghdown and Vicar-General. It was signed by eighteen parish priests, by eighteen members of the nobility and four of the bishops of the Province, (including Dr Mark Skerrett, recently elected for the diocese of Killala). It was stressed that Dr Kirwan was 'remarkable for his loyalty to the Stuart King, James III' (the Young Pretender). Indeed, Dr Kirwan's uncle 'had been much esteemed by King James II'. A separate submission signed by seven canons of the diocese and three other bishops recommended Dr Anthony Blake, a former vicar-general, dean of Tuam and warden of Galway. In his favour they said 'he has powerful Catholic friends whom the magistrates esteem and this will give great protection during outbursts of persecution'. An indication surely that, despite the defeat of the Stuart cause a few years earlier at Culloden, the prospect of the Penal Laws being enforced was still such a matter for concern.

However Dr Kirwan was not appointed. In the event, one of the supporters of Dr Kirwan, Dr Mark Skerrett, who had been consecrated Bishop of Killala in January of that year was on 9th May 1749, himself transferred to Tuam. Oliver J. Burke, in his monumental *History of the Catholic Archbishops of Tuam,* says the appointment was due to the influence of the Young Pretender at the Court of Rome. The Stuarts were still accorded this degree of influence over bishops' appointments for many years after the last official Stuart King, James II, was ousted in 1689. Their influence in fact was to extend for another 140 years after this. It did not end until the last of the Stuart line, alias Henry IX, or Cardinal Henry Benedict Stuart, the Duke of York, died as late as 1807.

Archbishop Skerrett grasped the opportunity immediately after the first of the Penal Laws was repealed to build the first Catholic Chapel in Tuam in over two hundred years. It was a modest thatched edifice in a side-street, nowadays called 'Chapel Lane'.

Archbishop Philip Phillips, 1785 – 87

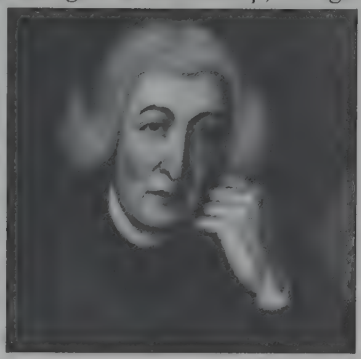
Archbishop Skerrett remained as archbishop for twenty-six years, until his death on 19 August 1785. During that time he had resided, as had all bishops during Penal times, anywhere but in Tuam. He lived mostly in a humble cottage in Annaghdown parish.[7] Seven years before his death, he requested that a co-adjutor be appointed and he recommended Archdeacon Thomas Kirwan, PP Headford. A year later the dean and chapter also proposed Kirwan as 'he would maintain peace in Tuam and an outsider would disturb that peace'.[8] Thomas Kirwan had been ordained in Compostella, Spain. The nomination was opposed, however, by the bishops of Connacht and, apparently, even by the canons themselves, who said afterwards that Kirwan had canvassed the canons singly and that they considered him 'an ambitious man without merit or learning'.

When Archbishop Skerrett's death occurred in 1785 in Annaghdown, ten canons of the diocese now postulated the name of Philip Phillips, Bishop of Achonry, as the person most suitable. Dr Phillips had previously been Bishop of Killala and was a native of Urlaur, just outside the boundary of the diocese of Tuam. He also owed his elevation to the episcopate to the Stuart Young Pretender. At one time he had been an officer in the army of Austria.[9] Bishop Troy of Ossory, later Archbishop of Dublin, had also proposed him. Dr Troy noted that most of the Tuam diocesan clergy were 'French', meaning that they held 'Gallican' principles, emphasising their tendencies to some independence from Rome. Troy had depended for his information on Bishop Fallon of Elphin, who recommended Phillips for 'his prudence, gentleness and suavity'. This opinion was not, however, shared by Fr Valentine Bodkin, a very blunt man, the agent of the western bishops in Rome. He described him as a 'toothless goutish septuagenarian'. Dr Phillips was, notwithstanding, appointed by Rome on 1 October 1785 and disproved the opinion of Bodkin, as he turned out to be a most active archbishop.

His reign was short, as he died in September 1787, a short time after holding a five-day provincial synod. He had caught a fever as a result of sleeping on a bed of rushes on a visit to Aran. He was buried in his family grave at Urlaur Abbey, Co Mayo.

Archbishop Boetius Egan, 1787 - 98

Now in 1787, the Tuam canons favoured Boetius Egan as archbishop, though they also expressed some support for the vicar-general, Thomas O'Connor, a native of Tuam. Boetius Egan, of the Egans of Dunblaney, Dunmore, had been appointed to Achonry on the translation of Archbishop Phillips. Amazingly, it appears that the consecration of Boetius Egan took place in the Protestant cathedral in Tuam, as he exultingly informed Rome.[10] This arose, apparently, as a result of an old friendship between the Egan family of Dunblaney and the then Protestant Dean of Tuam, Dean Burton, who considered that the tiny RC Penal church erected by Archbishop Skerrett in Chapel Lane to be altogether too small and miserable for such an occasion.



On 3rd December 1787 Boetius Egan was appointed to Tuam. Thomas O'Connor was appointed on the same day as Bishop of Achonry. Boetius Egan had been ordained in the Irish College of Bordeaux in 1763 and had served as PP Kilkerrin–Clonberne after his nineteen year stay on the continent. He died on 28 January 1798, after only eleven years as archbishop

Archbishop Edward Dillon, 1798 - 1809

An account of the election of the vicar-capitular following the death of Boetius Egan is recorded in a letter of Bishop O'Connor of Achonry — himself a candidate with a hope for the office. Apparently the Tuam Canons had been evenly split in their vote for the position of the vicar-capitular, the temporary diocesan administrator. Bishop Bellew of Killala, a tireless campaigner to extricate himself from what he described as the 'the bogs of Mayo' and also a hopeful for Tuam, was glad of the indecision and grasped the opportunity, as the senior Connacht bishop, to convene a meeting of the Connaught bishops to sort out the Tuam situation. The O'Connor family of Tuam were heavily involved in promoting the cause of their brother, Thomas, Bishop of Achonry. The bishops' meeting was held at Moylough[11] but their efforts were thwarted when Rome appointed Dr Edward Dillon, a native of Carna, Ballinasloe. He had been Bishop

Early sketch of Archbishop Dillon's modest cottage at Tullinadaly Hill, Tuam.

of Kilmacduagh and Kilfenora since 1795. Now, three years later, he was appointed as the new archbishop of Tuam. Dr Dillon had previously been Rector of the Irish College at Douai.

The Penal days were waning, and Dr Dillon took courage, on his accession in 1798, to occupy a small house at Waterslade, at the bottom of Tullinadaly Hill in Tuam. He was the first Catholic archbishop to reside in the town for one hundred and fifty years. Presumably he was more forthright and public in his leadership of his flock than his predecessors, for in 1803, he merited the criticism, or tribute, of Lord Sligo that he was 'one the most daring and dangerous villains of his cloth'.[12]

Dr Dillon was required to give detailed information on the parishes of the diocese, the number of clergy and their respective incomes, including funding for church maintenance. His list is of historical interest in that one can see the continuity in the parish structures as well as the small changes in the formation of parishes by way of divisions, extensions and amalgamations. The parishes are listed according to their ancient names and those marked with an asterisk are those in which one or more of the clergy were from Religious Orders:

	PARISH	CURATES	INCOME
1	Tuam	3	£150
2	Westport*	2	140

3	Castlebar	2	130
4	Annagh and Bekan	2	130
5	Ballinrobe	I	100
6	Newport*	I	100
7	Dunmore	2	100
8	Claremorris	2	90
9	Knock and Aughamore*	I	90
10	Turlough	I	90
11	Ballinakill and Boffin*	2	90
12	Kiltulla	I	80
13	Ross	I	70
14	Crossboyne and Tagheen	1	70
15	Clare Tuam*	1	70
16	Gong	1	70
17	Kilmaine	-	70
18	Headford*	1	70
19	Partry	1	60
20	Moyrus	1	65
21	Hollymount	1	65
22	Templetogher	1	65
23	Islandeady	1	65
24	Kilkerrin and Clonbern	I	75
25	Kilmeena	-	65
26	Kilmaclasser	-	65
27	Athenry*	1	60
28	Balla, Drum and Manulla	1	65
29.	Kilconly and Kilbannon	1	6o
30	Moylough	2	65
31	Monivea	I	6o
32	Annaghdown *	1	65
33	Kilgeever	1	60
34	Aran Isles	-	60
35	Moore	-	6o
36	Addregoole and Liskeavy	1	65
37	Ballindoon and Omey		50
38	Ballintubber	1	50
39	Aughagower	-	50
40	Mayo and Roslea	1	45

41	Ballinchalla and Kilmolara-		40
42	Donaghpatrick	-	40
43	Burriscarra	-	40
44	Kilvine	1	45
45	Achill	-	40
46	Killererin*	1	40
47	Abbeyknockmoy	-	40
48	Kilbannon	-	40
49	Kilcoona and Kilkilver	-	40
50	Robeen	-	30
51	Menna	-	36
52	Gorumna	-	36
S3	Clare Island and Inisturk	-	36
54	Lackagh	-	45
55	Kilmeen	-	25
56	Spiddal	-	36

Dr Dillon decided it was opportune to set up a diocesan seminary in Tuam and for this he needed the licence of the Protestant archbishop of Tuam. One of the remaining Penal laws decreed that any educational institution must be run by a reputable person, as guaranteed by the Protestant bishop of the diocese. Dr Dillon therefore took the precaution to apply for a licence from his contemporary, Archbishop Beresford.

The intention was to conform to the desired wish of the 16th century Council of Trent that there should be a seminary in each diocese for the proper training of priests. Such a desire could not, of course, have been implemented during the Penal Days. St Jarlath's College was to be that seminary and for many decades was to ordain priests for the archdiocese. When Maynooth College gradually developed as the National Seminary, students from St Jarlath's moved to Maynooth but only after studying much of their Philosophy and Theology in Tuam. Until the 1960's, it was to continue as a 'minor seminary', the only secondary school recognised for the education of boys who were to be the future priests of the archdiocese.

The man appointed to be the First President of the College was a young priest, Fr Oliver Kelly. The terms of the licence granted by the Protestant archbishop gives

an interesting insight into the spirit of the time and the subordinate place of the Catholic Church in the realm. It dates from 17 October 1800:

> William by Divine Providence Lord Archbishop of Tuam, Bishop of Ardagh, Primate and Metropolitan of Connaught—to our beloved in Christ, the Revd. Oliver Kelly of Tuam aforesaid greeting.
>
> Whereas the Most Revd. Edward Dillon R.C.A. of the Diocese of Tuam and R.C.P. of Connaught; Hath by his Nomination in writing bearing date the Seventeenth day of October in the year of Our Lord, one thousand Eight Hundred appointed and recommended unto to us you the said Oliver Kelly as a fit and proper person to keep a preparatory school for the Royal C.C. of Saint Patrick Maynooth to be by him holden in the Town of Tuam, County of Galway and Diocese of Tuam aforesaid,
>
> And We therefore being satisfied as to your abilities and due Qualification in discharging your duty therein, and having therefore Accepted of such the Appointment of the said Revd. Edward Dillon, do by these Presents, Grant and Confirm unto you the office or employment of 'Schoolmaster of the said Preparatory School of Maynooth, as aforesaid, With all the Rights, Profits, and Emoluments, to the same belonging or in any way appertaining, so long ' as you shall continue to behave yourself well and to continue to discharge your duty with propriety in the said office of Schoolmaster of said Preparatory School. You the said Oliver Kelly having first taken the Oath of Allegiance as by Law Required.
>
> In Testimony whereof, We have caused our Archiepiscopal Seal to be hereunto Affixed the seventeenth day of October in the year of Our Lord One Thousand Eight Hundred.
> William, Tuam and Ardagh.
> Charles Davies, *Not. Pub. D. Regr*

Archbishop Dillon saw the very gradual emergence of the diocese from the culture of the Penal Days. His churches were, however, still miserable, his priests still in short supply. They seldom possessed even such luxuries as a set of vestments for Sunday Mass.

He lived through the stirring times of the 1798 Rebellion, the arrival of the French forces in Killala and the short-lived takeover of Castlebar, Westport, Ballinrobe and Newport. He had no time for the rebellion and he, in common with other Irish Bishops, supported the enactment of the Act of Union rather than witness the possibility of an invasion from revolutionary France and the continuance of a hostile Irish Parliament in Dublin.

PART TWO

THE ARCHBISHOPS OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Archbishop Oliver Kelly 1815 – 34

'The Tuam Schism' of 1809 - 1815

Archbishop Dillon was archbishop from 1798 until 1809. In those ten years the character of the Irish church had changed considerably, as the new priests from Maynooth were coming on-stream and as the Penal Laws were, at last, falling into disuse. A greater self-confidence was emerging in the ordinary people and the hold of the landed gentry over the church was beginning to wane.

The Catholic bishops of Connacht before 1800, invariably, came from the landed class. One of these, Bishop Bellew of Killala, had been a disappointed applicant for a transfer to four other dioceses for over twenty years. He had been bishop of Killala from 1769 and had constantly been asking that he be delivered from 'the misery and the air of the Mayo swamps which so distressed him'.[13] Nicholas Archdeacon, whose sister was married to another landlord, Blake of Ballyglunin, was Bishop of Kilmacduagh. Dr Valentine Bodkin, formerly an agent for the Connacht bishops in Rome, had now become the Warden of Galway. All were of noble families and at one time fellow-students in the Irish College in Rome. Bishop Bellew in particular had always been a turbulent individual. His cousin, Archbishop Blake, Archbishop of Armagh, appointed him to the important parish of Dundalk just one year after ordination and caused great dissension in Armagh diocese. It merited two years suspension for Archbishop Blake. Rome's solution to the trouble was to appoint Bellew as Bishop of Killala. By 1809, on the death of Archbishop Dillon, tensions in the new Irish church were also moving towards trouble in the west.

All was to come to a head one week after Archbishop Dillon of Tuam died on 20 August 1809. He had been in poor health for some time and in his latter years he had depended greatly on Fr Oliver Kelly as his Vicar –General. It is known that he had requested Rome that Oliver Kelly be appointed as his Co-adjutor. Fr Kelly had been a student in the Irish College in Salamanca and taught theology there. But, unlike all his predecessors, he came from humble origins, his father being a small tenant farmer at Curraghmore, Kilkerrin. In 1800 he had become the first President of St Jarlath's College and subsequently had been parish priest of Kilmeena and Westport.

Apparently the Connacht bishops were united in their intention to block the appointment of Oliver Kelly as archbishop, in favour of another Boetius Egan, a nephew of a former Archbishop of the same name. By now Boetius Egan was the Dean of the Tuam diocesan chapter. The chapter had assembled in early September of 1809, in accordance with law, to elect a vicar-capitular, or temporary administrator, in place of the deceased Archbishop Dillon. According to a later report signed by the canons of the diocese on 25 Nov 1809, Dean Egan was present at that meeting but, fearing an outcome of the appointment of Oliver Kelly to the position, asserted that the canons had no right to elect a vicar-capitular. This prerogative, he claimed, belonged to the bishops of the province. Dean Egan withdrew from the meeting and then called on the senior bishop in the province, the redoubtable Dr Bellew, to intervene. The remainder of the Tuam Chapter of canons went ahead and elected Canon Oliver Kelly as Vicar-Capitular.

Bishop Bellew, as the senior suffragan bishop, declared their decision null and void and purported to appoint Dean Egan as the vicar-capitular. This simple canonical dispute would have been ruled on immediately in favour of the canons if Rome could have intervened. However, the confusion was magnified because Pope Pius VII was then held in captivity by Napoleon and was living under house-arrest at various places in France.

The Connacht bishops, four of whom offered themselves with Dean Egan as suitable for the post, were anxious to block Fr Kelly's appointment as archbishop.[14] The appointment was to take over five years to resolve. The sorry, but intriguing controversy has been well described by the late Fr Martin Coen, Galway, who published his findings in *JGAHS Vol. 33, 1977-78.*

The ensuing attempts by the Primate, Archbishop O'Reilly of Armagh, to heal

'the Tuam schism' and an attempt by the specially appointed delegate, Archbishop Troy of Dublin, later, were all to prove fruitless. As the Pope was still in captivity from July 1809 until his triumphant return to Rome on 24 May 1814, Fr Oliver Kelly had to carry on as best he could as the legal Vicar-Capitular. He did however, have the approval of the Archbishop of Armagh and several other Irish bishops and he had the total support of the priests and people of the diocese, with the exception of the two Egan brothers and some of their supporters. The parish priests also nominated Fr Oliver Kelly as their desired candidate to be the next archbishop. To this, both Archbishops O'Reilly of Armagh and Dr Troy of Dublin assented.

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The bishops of the province, in a letter to Rome, said that that Oliver Kelly was very ambitious, that he had never been a professor in Salamanca, and what would be outrageous to modern sensibilities, that 'he did not have nobility', being a tenant farmer's son.[15]

A meeting of the three archbishops and four other bishops ruled in favour of Fr Kelly's appointment as vicar-capitular. However it was not until February 1813 that the Roman Congregation formally confirmed this decision and, under threat of excommunication, warned Dean Egan not to interfere further.[16]

Almost immediately on the release of the Pope in May 1814 the Tuam appointment came up for attention and, on 25 September 1814, Dr Oliver Kelly was appointed as Archbishop of Tuam. This decision, however, was not accepted by the intransigent Nicholas Archdeacon, Bishop of Kilmacduagh and Kilfenora, the only one of the opposing group of Connacht bishops then still living. He again protested to Rome that the promotion of Dr Kelly was illegal but he was warned by Rome to make no further references to the election and to make peace with the archbishop. Nicholas Archdeacon died nine years later in 1823.

It had been a long and unseemly struggle in which old prejudices, a changing Ireland and strong ambitions of a few careerists played their part in a struggle which was compounded by the absence of the Holy Father who, in other situations might have intervened earlier and made the decision that was eventually reached.

An Archbishop of the People

Oliver Kelly was responsible, in his lifetime, for many things for which the archdiocese must be eternally grateful. He inaugurated St Jarlath's College, with a licence from the then Protestant Archbishop of Tuam. He built the Church of St Mary in Westport on the South Mall. He built the Catholic Bishop's Palace fronting Bishop St near the Cathedral, now the Diocesan Archives. He built the old Presbytery for the priests of Tuam on the Ballygaddy Road and, above all, it was he who initiated, on 18 March 1827, the mammoth task of planning and later seeing almost to completion the magnificent Cathedral of the Assumption in Tuam. His architect was Dominic Madden, then relatively unknown, who was to go on to be one of the foremost architects of the day.

In the decade after his appointment he took a full part in the campaign for obtaining full rights in the realm for Catholics. In the campaign the British Government were striving to reserve a right of Veto on appointments to Catholic bishoprics and to allow certain payments to the Catholic clergy in lieu of their granting these rights. Dr Kelly was to the fore in the successful opposition to both of these highly dangerous measures.

The Condition of the Catholic Churches

To appreciate the background against which Oliver Kelly dreamed of a new Catholic Cathedral and to obtain a glimpse of the character of the man, we might quote the following from evidence he gave to an Enquiry of the Committee of British House of Commons into the State of Ireland on 23 March 1825. The examination of the archbishop was as follows:

> **Q**. In the archdiocese of Tuam what is the state of the chapels in the different parishes, and what is the character and degree of accommodation afforded to the population of the Catholic persuasion for the celebration of religious worship
> **R**. The state of the chapels in the archdiocese of Tuam is very wretched. As far as my memory has been able to serve me, without having any document to go by at the moment, I believe there are in the archdiocese of Tuam about fifteen to eighteen

slated chapels, and eight or ten now in progress; there are in all about one hundred and six places for catholic worship.

Q. How are they protected from the weather?
R. With the exception of those I have mentioned, all the others are thatched chapels; some of them wretched, none of them sufficiently spacious to contain the congregation, and in many instances the public prayers are celebrated in the open air, having no covering hut the canopy of heaven.

Q. Can you state to the Committee the number of the largest congregation which has been in the practice of assembling at any one of those places where the accommodation is insufficient ?
R. I have known congregations to average from 1,000 to 1,500 where they had not sufficient accommodation in places of worship.

Q. Where there are chapels for the reception of the people, is it the practice for great numbers to assemble without side, in the neighbourhood of the place of worship, or do they do so from the impossibility of their being received and accommodated within the building?
R. They remain on the outside because there is no accommodation, no room for them in the inside.

Q. Do they equally remain outside, notwithstanding the inclemency of the weather, or other circumstances which might add to the inconvenience of their being so ex posed ?
R. They remain outside under the inclemency of the weather for the purpose of offering up their prayers, and because they cannot get room and accommodation in the house.

Q. Will you have the goodness to describe to the Committee such a place of religious worship as that you have last alluded to, what may be its size, the mode in which it is constructed, and the probable expense of such an edifice?
R. I have seen some of those edifices where the walls of the house were not above eight or ten feet high, twelve or fifteen in breadth, and forty or fifty in length.

Q. What might be the number of the congregation to attend where only such a building existed.
R. If there could be accommodation for them at many of those places, the number would amount to 1,000 or more.

Q. Have you any funds in your arch-diocese, or other resources applicable to the construction of places of worship, or to the keeping them in repair?
R No funds whatever, except the voluntary contributions of *the* faithful; the contributions of the clergy and the bishops, and the aid they receive from their Protestant brethren and neighbours.

Q. Has that aid been liberally given, and without any admixture of religious feeling?
R. I have been very much engaged in erecting chapels, of the slated chapels that have been erected; most of them have been in my time; I have been in the several parishes myself and have taken a part very frequently in the collection, and I do not recollect any instance of my being refused by a Protestant gentleman when I applied to him to contribute towards a chapel.

A New Cathedral for Tuam

When it came then to plan a new Cathedral, this was the state of the Catholic people of his diocese. Oliver Kelly, of course, was well aware of the wonderful Cathedrals of Spain where he had been educated, and would have seen some of the great Cathedrals in France, through which he would have journeyed. The modest Catholic chapel in Chapel Lane, pointedly situated off the main High Street of the town, which had been in use now for forty years, could barely contain 350 people. On 11 March 1824 he intimated to his friend Eneas McDonnell that 'a new idea has occurred to me and that I intend to submit it to our committee in this town for the erection of a new chapel'. The present place of worship, he said was in a low, damp and unwholesome situation and was not sufficiently spacious to contain a third of the congregation. Hence many were prevented from attending Divine Worship. He was preparing a Memorial to the Commissioners of the Consolidated Funds to advance the sum of £5,000 for the said house. However he had no doubt that he would be refused.

The possibility arose of obtaining a large site on Bishop Street, to the rear of the recently acquired site of an old police Barracks on which the new residence for the archbishop had been built. It was an opportunity not to be lost. A map of Tuam of 1720 showed that the Established Church, through the person of the Protestant Archbishop, had control of large-scale tracts of land in Tuam as ecclesiastical lands, amounting almost to two thirds of the lands on which the town was built. The occupant of that position in the 1820's was Dr Le Poer Trench, a person who gave much concern to Oliver Kelly.

In his earlier years as archbishop, Oliver Kelly had had an excellent relationship with the Protestant Archbishop Le Poer Trench and both men worked together to relieve the suffering of many poor people in the dreadful famine of 1822. However, later on, and especially after the advent of the 'Second Reformation' in the 1830's events put a strain on that relationship because of the change in the demeanour of Protestant leaders in their lending support to the aggressive proselytising campaign of that era.

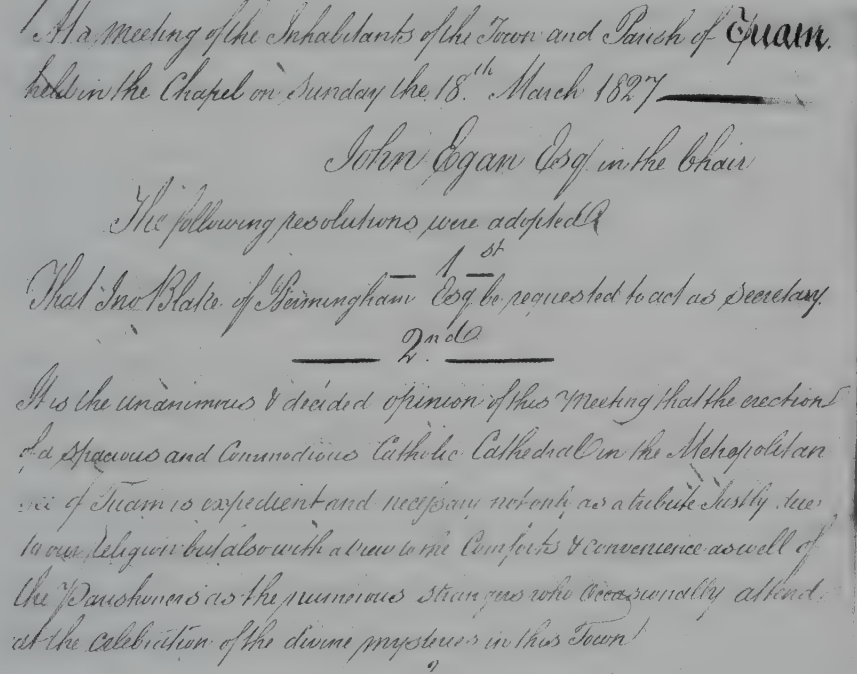
In a remarkable series of more than fifty letters from Oliver Kelly, covering the years 1823-1829 and published in *The Tuam Herald* from January to November of 1916, Dr Kelly has much to say, in private, about the said archbishop. He was writing to an influential member of the Irish Bar, a former lay-student of Maynooth College, Eneas McDonnell of Westport. Mr McDonnell was a friend of Daniel O'Connell, editor of the *Dublin Chronicle* and agent of the Irish Catholics in London. He was a trusted adviser of Archbishop Kelly who, in facing difficulties of obtaining sites for schools and churches, bemoaned the loss of the previous Protestant Archbishop Beresford. Beresford, he said was a prelate 'who lived in peace with and good will with his neighbours of every denomination, who never insulted or attempted to degrade his fellow creatures because they happened to differ from him on specific points of speculative religion and who extended relief to the needy without tampering with their consciences'. Le Poer Trench, he said, 'declared that he will not renew for any tenant that will not give a proper assurance that no Popish chapel will be built on his premises'.[17]

However the desired site on Bishop St would provide ample space for a large church building and grounds. A lease could be obtained for 'Keighry's Park', ironically on lands which originally were monastic lands which belonged to the medieval abbey of St John. Though the lease was only for 'three lifetimes', or ninety-nine years, this could be sorted out later. In fact, a head-rent continued to be paid yearly for one hundred years to the Handcock estate – an obligation that was liquidated only in 1930, by Archbishop Gilmartin.

It was the scale of the plan that was the mark of the visionary, Oliver Kelly. By April 1827, just two years after giving his evidence on the miserable state of the church buildings in the diocese, he was ready to lay the foundation stone for his mammoth 'Emancipation project'.

The Minute Book of the building committee, including a list of subscribers, weekly outgoings and correspondence has, miraculously, survived and is now in

a bound volume in the Tuam Diocesan archives.[18] A formal meeting in 'the Chapel' of Tuam on 18 March 1827 resolved that 'it is the unanimous and decided opinion of this meeting that the erection of a spacious and commodious Catholic Cathedral in the Metropolitan See of Tuam is expedient and necessary as a tribute justly due to our Religion but also with a view to the comforts and convenience as well of parishioners and the numerous strangers who occasionally attend at the celebration of the divine mysteries in this town.'


At a meeting of the Inhabitants of the Town and Parish of Tuam held in the Chapel on Sunday the 18th March 1827

John Egan Esq in the Chair

The following resolutions were adopted

1st

That Jno Blake of Birmingham Esq be requested to act as Secretary

2nd

It is the unanimous & decided opinion of this Meeting that the erection of a Spacious and Commodious Catholic Cathedral in the Metropolitan See of Tuam is expedient and necessary not only as a tribute justly due to our Religion but also with a view to the Comforts & Convenience as well of the Parishioners as the numerous Strangers who occasionally attend at the Celebration of the divine mysteries in this Town

Extract from Minute Book of First Cathedral Committee, 1827

A commitment for an annual instalment of five shillings per year, or one penny per week, for five years, was to be requested from parishioners. Once entered upon, this would become a lawful debt. All who contributed from one pound to five pounds were to be allowed one vote in deliberations and those who contributed over this amount should have an extra vote per five pounds contributed. They soon resolved to adopt the plans in 'simple Gothic style' of Mr Dominick Madden, architect. The architect was to be paid 'one shilling in the pound for whole expenditure' but the committee reserved the right to discontinue his services 'at any time his attendances should not be approved of.'

The account for the week of 5 May 1827, just five weeks after the original meeting of the committee, gives an idea of the scale of the work on site, under the principal contractor, Thomas Feagan. There were on site 179 labourers and nineteen carts drawing lime and stones. The amount paid out in that week for all labour and materials was £14.1.7. Each week two members of the committee, in their turn, were appointed as overseers for that week. By the week of 1 June thirty-seven masons were also working on site and sixty loads of stone had been delivered from the quarry at Cloonmore during that week. Later the stone for the pillars was brought from quarries in Cong. Each labourer was required to provide a certificate of residence from one of the Tuam clergy in order to obtain employment. The labourer's rate in 1827 was eight pence per week.

The raising of the funds for such a building was an enormous task, even in good times. The shortage of funds did cause the length of the building to be considerably reduced, which explains the rather truncated scale of the apse at the rear of the sanctuary. The re-planning caused a disagreement with the architect, Dominick Madden and, eventually, the discontinuance of his services.

A letter signed by the Secretary, Fr Martin Loftus and dated 23 May 1829, made this clear to the architect:

> I am directed by the Tuam Cathedral Committee to inform you that, taking into consideration the state of their funds and the slender prospects before them, they have come to the resolution of discontinuing the services of an architect and that your account to date will be closed and settled whenever it is your convenience to call on this committee for that purpose. This communication I have been requested to make to you with the greatest possible discretion, as the committee would be unwilling to do anything that might in the least degree tend to affect your professional character.

This resulting dispute continued for almost a year. In two letters of Archbishop Kelly to Mr Madden, dated 17 April 1830, he reminded Mr Madden that, in the previous October he had paid him the full amount of what appeared due to Mr Madden but he now agreed to the matter being referred to arbitration under Mr Bellew of Mountbellew and Major Kirwan of Castlehackett. 'Twice or thrice' he said, 'you have rejected the balance of money which appears due to you from our books … for reasons I cannot discover'.

It is clear from the detailed discussions and resolutions of the committee, on matters architectural and technical as well as financial, that several of the

members had a high degree of competence. The names of the weekly overseers during 1827 included such names as: James Egan, Dr Egan, Dr Clarke, James Kirrane, Mark Blake, James Henderson, Archbishop Kelly, John Keary and John Blake. After the discontinuance of the architect, Mr Madden, the committee and the archbishop apparently supervised the work themselves, aided by a clerk of works, Marcus Murray.[19] They had, however, the benefit of a working model of the Cathedral, which they commissioned at an early stage from a Mr Murphy, for the sum of £30 sterling.[20] The quality of the work of the archbishop and his committee in bringing the project to completion can therefore be termed no less than phenomenal.

Tuam Cathedral was the second Catholic Cathedral to be planned in all of Ireland for almost three hundred years, barely thirty years after the first stage of the abatement of the worst of the Penal Laws. A description of the grand design, as quoted in the Irish Catholic Directory for 1836 and in a Journal called *The Catholic Penny Magazine* of 1 June 1834 was as follows:

> The Cathedral of Tuam is an honour to any Country, and the glory of Ireland. This building, which is in the Gothic style of architecture, is 173 feet from the entrance of the tower to the grand oriel window. The nave 33 feet wide, the side aisles 17 feet each, besides the transepts measure 137 by 33. The height of the walls, rising over a champered and chiselled base, is 44 feet, including a deep-coved cornice, parapet and moulded embrasures; they are all of cut stone, supported by buttresses in the flanks. The buttresses diminish by water tables at appropriate distances, and terminate in minarets, ornamented with crockets, at the height of 14 feet over the parapet. There are six square towers, (one at each angle,) reduced to an octagon, by castellations at the height of 20 feet, and rising over a flank cornice 10 feet, at which elevation they are beautifully panelled and ornamented with a frieze and second cornice, each terminating with eight rich octagon minarets, at the height of 24 feet over the parapet; and forming one of the most striking beauties of the exterior.
>
> There is besides a tower in front, ornamented at each angle by a square buttress reduced into a beautiful octagon shaft by castellation at the height of 18 feet from the base; at the height of 30 feet, is further ornamented with a bold frieze and cornice, which is surmounted at the buttresses by a second tier of castellations. When finished it will present a beautiful specimen of Gothic doors, clock cases, louvre windows, with tracery, escutcheons, &c., terminating with an upper frieze, cornice, parapet, embrasures, and a large pinnacle over each of the octagon buttresses.

The building of the Cathedral continued for nine years until 1836. For over a

hundred years every priest in the diocese had to contribute each year to the Cathedral fund. A well-known anti-Catholic polemicist, Caesar Otway, thought that all Connaught must have been taxed to raise such an edifice. Oliver Kelly did indeed acknowledge the generous help of many Protestants for his work, despite the fact that the building coincided with the years of the contentious enactment of the Catholic Emancipation Bill of 1829.

This financial burden on the Catholic community was, of course, enormous. As well as making contributions to their own churches, Catholics were still often assessed by law to contribute to 'vestry cesses' for the Church of Ireland. In a letter of 14 March 1824 Kelly stated that 'for my own part, however ardently I may sigh for Catholic Emancipation, I am decidedly of the opinion that that more substantial good would be done for this unhappy and impoverished country by a proper modification in the Tithes and Vestry cesses, etc'. In Tuam quite recently a levy of £1,500 had been imposed on all its citizens by the Protestant Archbishop to pay for repairs to the Protestant cathedral. Many landowners, Catholic as well as Protestant, were liable also to pay the Tithes towards the Established Church. The Parish Priest of Turlough, Fr Paul McGreal, had been brought to court in 1833 for non-payment of sixteen shillings in Tithes to the Rev. G.V Hart.[21] A clergy meeting representing four parishes, in Ballindine on 1 April 1832 sent a resolution to the press as follows: 'that without the slightest hostility to the decent support and maintenance of the ministers of the Established Church, we deem it the greatest hardship to contribute one tenth of our labour and capital to uphold an establishment from which we cannot receive conscientiously spiritual instruction or temporal benefit'.[22]

The main structure of the Cathedral was completed before the death of Oliver Kelly. The work on the tower had still to be completed. It fell, then, to his successor, John McHale, to dedicate the new Cathedral on 18 August 1836, just seven years after Catholic Emancipation. By then the cathedrals of Newry and Carlow had also been completed.

The present name of the Cathedral as the 'Cathedral of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary' calls for some comment. The ancient name of the 12th century Catholic Cathedral in Tuam was St Mary's Cathedral, so it might seem appropriate that the name of Our Blessed Lady would be continued. The title of 'St Mary's' was an ancient one in Tuam. *Monasticon Hibernicum* refers to an abbey founded in 487 ad, under the title of the Virgin Mary. The titular name was

retained by the 14th century Cathedral, now the Synod Hall of the Church of Ireland in Tuam. Nevertheless, an early report of the building committee of the new Catholic Cathedral called it 'the Metropolitan Cathedral of St Mary, Tuam'. A newspaper account of the consecration ceremony of the new Cathedral in the *Connaught Ranger* of 23 August 1836 merely describes the new Cathedral as the 'Roman Catholic Cathedral of Tuam'.

The doctrine of the Assumption of Our Lady had always been part of the general faith of the Catholic Church, though its formal definition as a dogma of the Faith did not occur until 1950. Interestingly, as late as July 1925, an official appeal for funds for restoration works over the name of Archbishop Gilmartin and his committee requests subscriptions in aid of 'St Jarlath's Cathedral, Tuam'. The question has been asked whether the title was in fact conferred on the new Cathedral at a much later date. However, the coat of arms of Archbishop McHale, displayed in stone over the entrance door to the Cathedral, commemorates that he dedicated the Cathedral on 18 August 1837 *'in honorem BVM Assumptae'*. The crest, incidentally, has been criticised for its doubtful Latin wording but also because it did not name the real provider of the Cathedral, Archbishop Oliver Kelly.

The same coat of arms was to draw the ire of one notorious visitor to Tuam who had this to say of the new Cathedral and the presumption of these Catholics who had the audacity to assume titles, and use a coat of arms. The writer was none other than the English novelist, William Makepeace Thackeray. It gives a glimpse into the religious bigotry felt by upper-class Englishmen of the time.[23]

> At Tuam the coach stopped exactly for fourteen minutes and a half, during which time, those who wished might dine: but instead, I had the pleasure of inspecting a very mouldy dirty town, and made my way to the Catholic cathedral—a very handsome edifice indeed; handsome without and within, and of the Gothic sort. Over the door is a huge coat of arms, surmounted by a Cardinal's hat —the arms of the see, no doubt, quartered with John Tuam's own patrimonial coat; and that was a frieze coat, from all accounts, passably ragged at the elbows. Well, he must be a poor wag who could sneer at an old coat, because it was old and poor. But if a man changes it for a tawdry, gimcrack suit, bedizened with two-penny tinsel and struts about calling himself 'His Grace' and 'My Lord' when may we laugh if not then?
>
> There is something simple in the way in which these good people belord their clergymen, and respect titles real or sham. Take any Dublin paper. A couple of columns

Crest of John McHale over the main entrance to Tuam Cathedral

of it are sure to be filled with movements of the small great men of the world. Accounts from Derrynane state that the Right Honourable!, the Lord Mayor is in good health—his Lordship went out with his beagles yesterday—or His Grace (the Most Reverend the Lord Archbishop of Ballywhack), assisted by the Right Reverend the Lord Bishops of Trincomalee *and* Hippopotamus, etc..... Have the Irish so much reason to respect their lords, that they should so chronicle all their movements; and not only admire real lords, but make sham ones of their own to admire them!

The author at least acknowledged the gigantic task that had been accomplished. A similar acknowledgment was accorded to it by the Protestant archbishop of the day. When he first viewed the site of the Cathedral at an early stage of its construction, he is reputed to have said: 'what fool has undertaken such a task?'[24] It is even said that he called the Catholic archbishop 'Oliver Block-head'. Oliver Kelly, because of his rather frail figure, his stooped deportment and his tendency to sign his name as 'OL Kelly; had earned the nickname 'Oliver Longhead'. On this occasion his Protestant counterpart is reputed to have substituted the title 'Oliver Blockhead'. However, an anonymous donation of £100 on the day following his visit is believed to have come from the same critical archbishop!

A Healer of Old Disputes

It was Archbishop Kelly who presided over the final settlement of the anomalous position of the 350 year old 'wardenship of Galway', whereby the city and some neighbouring parishes were subject to a 'warden' rather than a Bishop, elected by the Galway tribes. The warden held office for one year, in later times for three years.[25] The arrangement gave rise to many unseemly disputes, akin almost to political disputes, in which various archbishops of Tuam, including Oliver Kelly, were called on to intervene. In 1831 the new diocese of Galway was instituted by Rome, and Archbishop Oliver Kelly had the privilege of consecrating Dr George Brown, as the first Bishop of Galway.

Death in Albano

Towards the end of 1833 Dr Kelly's health was declining, presumably under the burden of the work on the Cathedral. He was advised to visit the Continent, in the hope of some recovery in a better climate. His health, however, did not improve and he moved to Albano where he died on 18 April 1834. He was then only fifty seven years of age. The intention was that he be brought back to Tuam and be interred beneath his own work in the Cathedral in Tuam. Indeed he had directed in his will that he might be laid 'at the threshold of the great door to the Cathedral' and that a plaque requesting prayers for his soul would be placed in the entrance porch at the right hand side. However, by the special request of the Pope Gregory XVI, Archbishop Kelly was buried, as a signal honour, in the Church of Propaganda Fide in Rome.

An obituary in the Catholic Penny Magazine of June 1834 paid this tribute to Dr Kelly:

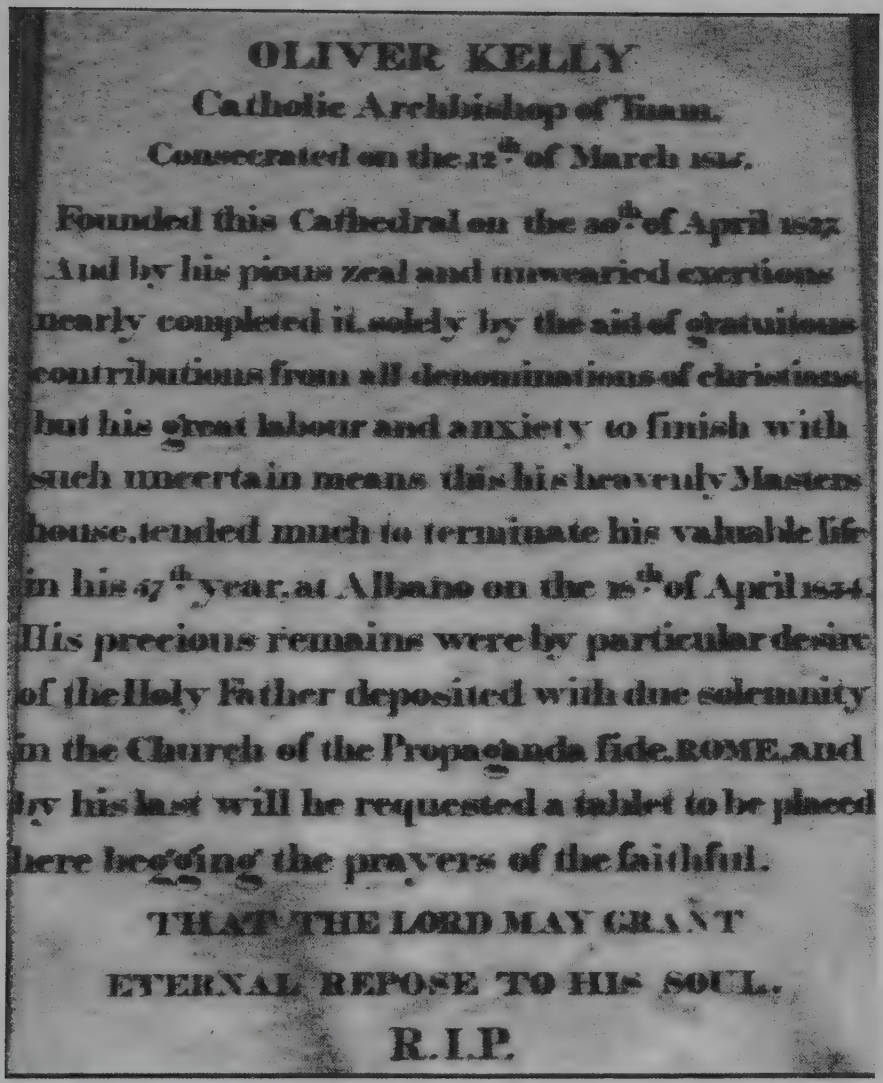
> His unalterable attachment to the purity of the Catholic faith, and his desire to preserve it in Ireland, against the wily machinations of state tricks, were unequivocally manifested in his opposition to the rescript of *Quarantotti* in 1814, to the Veto under every shape, and the pensioning project in 1825. He not only headed his own immediate bishops and clergy in denouncing those infamous measures, but on account of his peculiar firmness was chosen as president of the assembled bishops of Ireland, in synod, in 1815 when in the spirit of their great national apostle, they declared that the giving of any direct influence to the Protestant government of this country (by

> veto, nomination, or pensions) over Catholic clergy, would be as destructive of the peace of the country, as it would be subversive of religion in Ireland.

In relation to his lengthy evidence before the House of Commons Enquiry in 1825 on the tenets, morals and discipline of the Catholic Church, the writer said that Dr Kelly's evidence with that of his fellow bishops had had a powerful effect in opening up the minds of the English people 'to the pensioning and vetoistical arrangements' which their Government were at that time contemplating.

A simple wall-tablet in the entrance porch of his Cathedral states that by his last will Oliver Kelly requested that a tablet be placed there, begging the prayers of the faithful that the Lord might grant eternal life to his soul.

Oliver Kelly has not however been forgotten. A fitting monument to his memory was erected outside the church in his native parish of Kilkerrin, one hundred and seventy six years after his death, in November 2000, at the instigation of its Parish Priest at that time, Fr Seán Higgins.



Memorial Tablet to Oliver Kelly inside main door of Tuam Cathedral

ARCHBISHOP JOHN McHALE, 1834-1881

'The Lion of the fold of Judah'

The single greatest achievement of Dr Oliver Kelly was his planning and building of the Cathedral of the Assumption, bringing it almost to completion by the time he died on 18 April 1834 at Albano, Italy.

The question of succession on this occasion was not to cause the level of surprise or contention that it had done on the last occasion because Bishop John McHale was an outstanding candidate for Tuam. John McHale was born in 1791 in Tobernavine, Lahardane, Co Mayo, the sixth child of a family of eleven, three of whom were step-sisters of John. He was ordained in 1814 and was a Professor in Maynooth from 1815-25. He was appointed Co-adjutor Bishop of his native diocese of Killala in1825. In May 1834 he succeeded as its bishop on the death of Bishop Peter Waldron. This event occurred less than a month after the death of Archbishop Kelly of Tuam.

McHale was known personally to the then reigning Pope, Gregory XVI, as he had spent most of the year 1832 in Rome where he had been sought out by many influential persons to give special addresses and other assignments. Within the archdiocese, the name of Dean Bernard Burke, Parish Priest of Westport, had frequently been mentioned and, indeed, in the election by the parish priests he secured one vote more than John McHale. The third candidate in the *terna* was a very elderly man, Archdeacon Nolan of Balla. Dean Burke was, of course, in no way as clear a candidate as the illustrious Bishop McHale, the great defender of the Irish national spirit who had made his name for his frequent contributions to the public press under the name of *Hierophilos*, while still a professor in Maynooth. In the event, the Connacht bishops clearly favoured McHale

The only opposition to the possible appointment of John McHale was to come from an unlikely source, none less than Lord Melbourne, the Prime Minister of Great Britain and Ireland. He used various subterfuges to block John McHale's appointment. His Foreign Secretary, Palmerston, hearing of the likelihood of McHale being appointed, rapidly dispatched a messenger to Florence and Rome 'to try to get the Pope not to appoint any agitating bishop to Tuam, anybody but him'.[26]

Archbishop Murray of Dublin, who had been asked for his opinion, wrote: 'I must confess that the prelate, otherwise most worthy, sometimes uses too sharp a style as it seems when he writes about political matters'. Nevertheless, he said, he was 'happy to add his testimony to the votes of the bishops of the province of Tuam concerning that prelate, learned, pious, eloquent and deserving well of religion'.[27] Archbishop Murray would not be in the mould of John McHale, an ardent nationalist. In fact, he was generally classed as a 'Castle Bishop', regularly seen in Dublin Castle as a loyal supporter and confidant in Government circles.

Archbishop John McHale

The appointment of John McHale was announced on 8 August 1834 and his triumphal procession from Ballina to Tuam, through various towns in both dioceses, was accompanied by a vast horde of people. People of the diocese of Killala, in their tens of thousands, accompanied the new archbishop to the diocesan boundary at Pontoon Bridge, there to be greeted by another huge and representative party to welcome him to the archdiocese of Tuam, headed by the Vicar Capitular of the diocese and a large number of priests.[28] The welcome was

a prelude to the affection in which this friend of Daniel O'Connell was to be held for the next forty-seven years in Tuam as a champion of the newly-found spirit among the Irish people.

His love for the Irish language and all things Irish was a feature of a new brood of bishops, products of Maynooth College, who did not have to seek their education and training in continental colleges, as their forebears had. While other 19th century bishops may have been criticised for not promoting Irish, McHale, a fluent Irish speaker, translated into Irish *The Iliad* of the Greek poet Homer and preached through Irish in the Cathedral to the end of his days. He was the author of several other books, including his famous *Irish Catechism* and many devotional works. He also loved music and translated sixty of Moore's Melodies into Irish. In a letter to him in 1841, Thomas Moore said 'that these songs of mine should be translated, into what I might call their native language, is in itself a great gratification and triumph for me; but that such a tribute should come from the pen of Your Grace considerably adds to the pride and pleasure I feel.'[29]

The reputation of Archbishop McHale was such that he became the subject of no less than four biographies, all highly complimentary towards him. The first of these was the biography by his contemporary, Canon Ulick Bourke of Claremorris, published only a year after his death. There is also the enormous two-volume account by Monsignor Bernard O'Reilly, (1890); one by Nuala Costello published in 1939, and a recent work by Hilary Andrews in 2001. McHale's contribution to the Irish Church is also a major pre-occupation of leading historians of nineteenth century Ireland. Two books of the Chicago Professor, Emmet Larkin, covering the Irish Church from 1850 to1868, and heavily dependent on correspondence with Rome, read almost like another part-biography of McHale. There is no doubt that, in the Irish Church of the nineteenth century, McHale 'bestrode the narrow world like a Colossus'.

For more than fifty years, especially among the laity, he was widely lauded, even idolised, for his staunch defence of Catholicism and the Irish national spirit and for his attempts to remove the remaining shackles imposed by the British ascendancy. These great traits are admirably recorded in these biographies, but there are other views of Dr McHale, which perhaps make the writing of a more balanced, critical biography of this great man all the more necessary.

A glimpse of his extraordinary popularity may be obtained from the following

account of Dr McHale's visitation of parishes in Connemara, as recorded in the *Freeman's Journal* of 23 June 1843. 'On Wednesday, Dr McHale set out from Clifden for Errisslanagh, via Roundstone, which village during the night was brilliantly illuminated and, during the day, presented a most cheering scene, with hundreds of boats arrived from every quarter, carrying a banner, one of them with the words 'The Queen, O'Connell and McHale'. McHale was the nearest personage they had to Royalty!

There is no doubt about John McHale's ability, in his trenchant addresses and public letters, to oppose any policies seen to be unfair to the Catholic people. The collection of seventy-two of his better known public letters from his earlier lifetime in Maynooth and Killala covering the years 1820- 1834 were published in 1846. These, and the collection of thirty- eight of his Sermons and Discourses, edited by Thomas McHale and published in 1883, give a clear understanding of his courage and conviction in defending and explaining the faith and the great concerns of Catholic Ireland before and after Emancipation. Included in the latter work are lengthy addresses at the Synod of Thurles and in the Provincial Synods of Tuam in the 1850's.

The right to be 'Archbishop of Tuam'

His letter to the Prime Minister, Lord John Russell, in 1851 was an example of the power of his prose style, using, where necessary, the required amount of invective. It is especially remembered. The matter at issue was the proposed outlawing by the Government of the intention of the Catholic Church to designate to its Bishops titles of dioceses which already had Protestant bishops. The English establishment was showing its true colours. McHale always gave due respect to Queen Victoria as the sovereign. In fact, on the occasion of the Queen's coronation in June 1838, according to the *Galway Patriot* of 4 July 1838, among the windows illuminated in celebration of the event in Tuam were those of the Catholic Archbishop, the College of St Jarlath's and the Presbytery. Tradition says that Mc Hale was not at all averse to flying the Union Jack, even in the Cathedral, on occasions.

He was however never shy about criticising her Government. Her Government had already been affronted by the presumption of the Irish Catholic bishops in convening a national Synod, the Synod of Thurles in 1850. It was now further annoyed by the proposal of the Holy See to restore the Catholic Hierarchy in the United Kingdom. Here was a sign of the re-birth of old Popery and therefore the

Government accused the Holy See of arrogance. The objection to Catholic bishops holding the title of their own dioceses was particularly galling in Ireland. Tuam in particular, with a Catholic population in excess of 97%, had certainly cause for complaint.

Lord John Russell, the Prime Minister had often come under the censure of McHale. On this occasion, with characteristic defiance, McHale styled himself at the end of his letter 'John, Archbishop of Tuam'. A few passages from a long public letter to the Prime Minister gives a flavour of the power of his invective in such controversies.

> St Jarlath's,
> Tuam,
> Feb 20, 1851.
>
> What will be the issue of the conflict into which you are rushing with such headlong precipitation, but another glorious monument among the many, yet unrecorded, of the utter powerlessness of the world to subdue the Catholic Church, as well as the frustrated attempts of England to annihilate the Catholic hierarchy.
>
> And as for the Catholic hierarchy, and the titles of its bishops, your Lordship may be without any solicitude on that point. For, without any encroachment on the Royal prerogative, or any want of fealty to the Throne, the Catholic bishops enjoyed the titles of their sees long before their Protestant competitors or their titled patrons were heard of in history. And they will continue to enjoy them long after such competitors and their patrons shall have passed away.
>
> I am, your Lordship's obedient servant,
>
> John, Archbishop of Tuam.

He may of course be also referring to the fact that the Protestant archbishopric of Tuam had ceased to exist since the death of his old-time rival, Archbishop Le Poer Trench, in 1839. The outcome of the controversy, in any case, was that Lord John Russell lost caste among the Irish members of Parliament and his government fell soon afterwards.

On 26 January 1855 however, in a debate in the House of Lords, according to Hansard, McHale was again in the wars. A Lord Berners wanted to know why a recent Roman Catholic 'procession' led by McHale in his pontifical dress, had not been outlawed and pursued in the courts in defiance of that provision of the Catholic Emancipation Act, (10 Geo IV c. 7) which prohibited the 'wearing the habits of their order' in public places. The fact that the alleged procession was no more than twenty yards long from the gate of McHale's residence to the entrance gate of the Cathedral did not seem to matter to him. However the Earl of Aberdeen, on behalf of the Government, in his reply, took the view that, perhaps, instead of such an event leading to a violation of the peace, in fact a prosecution in the case might have been infinitely more likely to provoke it. However the complaint at such a level was a sign of the times!

Political Issues

While he lived, the great Daniel O'Connell maintained a constant correspondence with the archbishop on such subjects as Repeal, the Poor Law Bill, the Tithes Act and several other issues. O'Connell had an enormous respect for his judgment. He had dubbed McHale 'the Lion of the fold of Judah', a tribute which was to be forever quoted in his honour. A rich selection of their correspondence over the years 1830-1845 is quoted at length in Oliver J. Bourke's *History of the Catholic Archbishops of Tuam*, p 246-331.

McHale's nomination of candidates in Galway and Mayo elections in 1841 was sufficient to have these candidates returned unopposed. Similar support, however from McHale and two of his priests, Frs Peter Conway and Luke Ryan, for George Henry Moore in the Mayo election of 1857 had, as its outcome, the unseating of the successful Moore. A Parliamentary enquiry was held and McHale himself was sub-poenaed to appear before the Commission of Enquiry in London. He was questioned for most of two days and his resistance to the hostile cross-questioning on that occasion was remarkable for its dignity and forthrightness[30]. A similar case arose in 1872 with the unseating of another M.P, Captain Nolan of Ballinderry after the Galway election of that year. This type of publicity was one of a number of irritants to his great adversary, Cardinal Paul Cullen of Dublin and causes for complaints by him to Rome.

The National School System

Nothing was more controversial in the lifetime of McHale than his inveterate hatred of the British-imposed system of National Schools, introduced after 1831.

Despite his grave suspicions of the motives of the institutors of the system, particularly his opposition to its forebears of the Kildare Place Society, he did acquiesce somewhat in its proliferation throughout his diocese for its first few years.

By 1840, however, he had made his mind up: the National Schools system was not to be the schooling system in his diocese for Catholic children. Some Catholic bishops, under the influence of Archbishop Murray of Dublin, tolerated the system to advance education but with the hope of adapting it to the needs of formation in Catholic upbringing. But McHale saw the system as dangerous, both to Catholic belief and to the culture of the Irish nation. One of the Commissioners of Education, the Protestant Archbishop Whateley had, in an unguarded moment, stated that the education supplied by the National Board was 'gradually undermining the vast fabric of the Catholic Church'.[31] Their purpose, McHale became convinced, was 'to de-nationalise the Catholic children'. It was not just the scriptural contents of the texts used, it was the whole ethos, designed under the guise of being non-denominational, which in his view, would eventually distort the Irish character. His diocese was 97% Catholic, perhaps the most Catholic diocese in all of Ireland, and yet he felt he had to water down the Church's role in education to meet the supposed objections of a tiny minority. In fact, no objections were voiced, as McHale's Protestant counterpart in Tuam, Archbishop Le Poer Trench, had likewise opposed the National schools which, he said, provided an 'unhallowed system of education'. However, bishops of the Established Church, still in receipt of Tithes, were in a better position to provide schools of their own for their own denomination.

Writing to Daniel O'Connell on 26 April 1838, McHale had this to say: 'the books they put into the hands of the children are calculated to unsettle their belief, or at least, to diminish the reverence of the faith of their fathers; and by the entire system it is intended, as is acknowledged by a competent authority, Mr A R Blake, to place the religious education of the children in the hands of the Crown'.[32]

A declaration signed by ninety-three priests of the archdiocese in 1845, no doubt under the influence of McHale, stated that they fully concurred with their bishops 'that the measures of the recent academic Education Act, in its altered as well as its original form, were dangerous to faith and morals'.[33]

The Irish Catholic population were just emerging from centuries of oppression and were now facing a new form of interference. McHale had inherited a diocese where in 1834 the best that could be done to advance education was that twenty-nine of the makeshift Catholic chapels doubled as school-houses during the week. Several priests had accepted the new national schools, because of the welcome, if minuscule, funding that was available. However, as more and more restrictions were being placed on their operation under the national scheme, McHale decided to take a stand.

The Irish bishops in 1839 had decided they would continue to monitor the developing National School system and try to ensure it would contain nothing inconsistent with Catholic faith or morals. The Connacht bishops, led by McHale, opposed this view and from 1840 those schools throughout the archdiocese were being either closed or in some cases being placed, by way of subterfuge, under the management of a competent lay-person, often a local Catholic landlord. McHale now encouraged priests to have their own schools, despite the great financial burden this involved. He himself invited the Presentation Sisters, and later the Sisters of Mercy and the Christian Brothers, to set up schools in conjunction with other charitable works in several towns in the diocese. These however could only meet the needs of a tiny fraction of the Catholic population.

His predecessor, Oliver Kelly, had secured the services of the Franciscans at Merchants' Quay in Dublin and enabled the Third Order Regular of St Francis, Franciscan Brothers, to set up schools in Mountbellew in 1818. Now McHale extended their remit to more than twelve centres, mostly in rural areas in the archdiocese.

Whatever chance McHale's stubbornly independent schools had of taking off, the advent of the Famine and the so-called 'Second Reformation' in its wake, made any such development well nigh impossible. In a circular to the clergy in January 1861, to 'abate the evils of mixed education, now so deservedly and generally deplored', he required a detailed reply to a questionnaire on national schools in each parish, inquiring specifically who was the patron of each school, who were the inspectors, who were the teachers, where were they trained, what portion of time was allotted to religious instruction etc.[34] On one occasion he personally inspected a mixed school at Delphi, in the company of seven priests, and because there were no Catholic emblems allowed in the classrooms, he forbade Catholics ever entering it again[35].Even when the National system, designed as a mixed

system, became virtually denominational after a few decades, McHale stoutly refused to acknowledge them up to the end of his life. The outcome was that, after his forty-seven years as archbishop, many people of the archdiocese were, undoubtedly, handicapped by their lack of a basic primary education.

In relation to the advent of University education in Ireland in the 1840's McHale, in consort with all the Irish bishops, supported by Rome, opposed the proposed Queen's Colleges as 'godless'. The bishops' subsequent efforts to set up the 'Catholic University' had the support of McHale at first, but he soon grew cold towards the idea. In particular he opposed the selection by Cullen of an Englishman as its first Rector, the great John Henry Newman, later Cardinal Newman. After four years in the 1850's of muted co-operation with the project, he cancelled all collections in Tuam diocese in aid of the Catholic University.

Souperism

Since the Act of Union of 1800, there was a new interest in the 'conversion' of the poverty-stricken Catholics of Ireland, weaning them away from the alleged 'errors of Popery'. Several proselytising movements were instituted and the area of greatest interest was the west of Ireland. This was particularly so in the wake of the Great Famine. The areas most affected by the new evangelical crusades can be partly identified as the areas where Archbishop McHale introduced the schools of the Franciscan Brothers. These were in Achill, Clifden, Roundstone, Kilkerrin, Cummer, Tourmakeady, Errew, Granlahan, Corrandulla and Ballyglunin. The 'Second Reformation', as it was called, could not go unchallenged, and McHale was certainly ready for any confrontation. The areas of special conflict were Tourmakeady, Achill and Clifden. In Tourmakeady, McHale was represented by the indomitable, nationalist priest, Fr Pat Lavelle. There he battled with no less a personage than the Protestant Bishop of Tuam, Thomas Plunkett. Dr Plunkett was himself a landlord in the Tourmakeady area and Fr Lavelle had charged that people evicted in 1860 were singled out because they 'had refused to send their children to schools alien to their faith'.[36]

In Westport, Dean Bernard Burke, had consistently argued that the Archbishop's policy in regard to the National Schools had caused much of the growth in souperism. Proselytism, he argued, always thrived where there was less education.

Proselytising in the Clifden area reached an enormous level under the

campaigning of one Andrew Dallas, an English zealot preacher, and in Achill Island where the preacher and extraordinary development entrepreneur, Rev. Edward Nangle, was extremely active at Dugort. Dallas claimed that, during his lifetime, with some help from Rev Hyacinth D'Arcy of Clifden, he had set up twenty-one churches, eight parsonages and thirty school-houses on the western seaboard.[37] John McHale's approach to this new wave of Protestant evangelism was forthright, but sympathetic. He believed that those who, under duress, had 'taken the soup' generally remained faithful to their old religion in their heart and he believed that, eventually, they would return to it. Constant reports to Rome, detailing McHale's alleged apathy in this regard, were rebutted by him in a succession of letters in the late 1850's, and again in the last decade of his life.

In facing the hostile threat of souperism, McHale did finally accept the tactic of special Missions, which had been adopted by other bishops. These were preached throughout the diocese, some of them very dramatic and fiery, in opposition to souperism. The Rosminians, the Vincentians and the Redemptorists all took their part and penitents who recanted their apostasy were publicly reconciled with the Church.

In the Catholic Directory of 1867 there appears the following *'apologia'* of McHale in regard to his policy on Catholic schooling and the alleged successes of the waves of proselytising.

> This is the only diocese in Ireland in which none of the schools conducted by the religious Orders are under state control, or derive public grants for their support. The eleven Franciscan schools, with an aggregate number on the roll of about 5,000; the two Christian Brothers' schools, Tuam and Westport, with their 1,400; and the six Convent Schools, with their 3,600 pupils, or an aggregate of 10,900 children, are supported solely by the religious orders themselves, assisted by the voluntary contributions of the people of the diocese.
>
> The organised scheme of pecuniary proselytising, supported by immense aid from England and Ireland, and backed by the persistent influence of many of the leading landed proprietors, has its head-quarters in this diocese; but notwithstanding the poverty of the people and, as a consequence, of the clergy, and the loss which abstinence from State grants inflicts on the schools of the religious communities, such is the deep attachment of the people to their faith, and such the zeal and activity of the

clergy, inspired by their venerated Archbishop, that no sensible effect has ever been produced on the population by all these adverse agencies, the diocese of Tuam containing in 1861, 966 Catholics in every 1,000 of the population, and ranking next to Dublin in the aggregate number of Catholics, numbering 302,367 souls.

The parochial Schools, under lay teachers are, considering the circumstances of the country, fair in number, and tolerably efficient.

Cardinal Cullen and Archbishop McHale

McHale's tolerance of such firebrand clerics as Fr Pat Lavelle, Parish Priest of Partry, especially when he turned to political areas, was to increase the hostility of Cardinal Cullen of Dublin towards McHale. It was only with the greatest reluctance, and after several failed attempts, that Rome, aided by Cullen, forced McHale to have Fr Lavelle temporarily suspended from ministry, because of his political outbursts. On one occasion the suspension could not be served on Lavelle for the simple reason that McHale had advised him not to be at home. Fr Lavelle had been National Vice-President of the Brotherhood of St Patrick, a cover name for the Fenians. His constant litigation, letter-writing, public statements and lectures throughout Ireland, England and Scotland were a never-ending pain to Cardinal Cullen. Cullen always suspected that McHale was tolerating and even supporting him.

Ironically, Paul Cullen, in his previous existence as Rector of the Irish College in Rome, had been confidant, until 1848, to McHale as well as to most Irish bishops, especially in their dealing with the Roman Congregation which was responsible for Irish affairs. In fact it was McHale's voice that ensured his appointment as Archbishop of Armagh, despite the fact that Paul Cullen was a native of faraway County Kildare. Cullen, writing to McHale at that time said: 'I fear Your Grace will have a great deal to answer for, having put forward my unworthy name'![38] Certainly, McHale did come to regret his proposal, because they were to become mutually incompatible. They were the ecclesiastical giants of their time and became rivals in determining the direction of the Irish Church of the nineteenth century.

Their relationship deteriorated within a few years. Cullen, describing McHale in a note to a friend in 1850, said he was not 'a very practical man and was difficult to handle in purely practical matters, however he means well'. As the years advanced, however, he grew more and more opposed to McHale. By 1853 he

described McHale as 'utterly destructive and impossible to deal with' and in relation to a bishops' meeting the following year, he said he was glad that he would be absent as, he said, 'Dr McHale delights in fighting, he is a real cross'. Cardinal Cullen's propensity in regard to bishops' meetings was that they should have their decrees always ratified by Rome and therefore become binding on its participants as well as confidential. McHale, on the other hand, had a strict belief in the old ways, where the independence of each bishop in his own diocese was paramount. Further, he wished to reserve his right to make public statements and to comment on any matter ecclesiastical bearing on his subjects, even if it had been debated at a general meeting.

In Cullen's many interventions to Rome in regard to episcopal appointments, he opposed any candidate who might have a leaning towards McHale. Furthermore, his complaints to Rome about McHale's ultra –nationalism grew stronger. Cullen had been transferred to the important see of Dublin by 1852 and, as an ex-Roman bureaucrat, was communicating his ideas and input into the thinking of the Roman Congregation through his successor at the Irish College, Monsignor Tobias Kirby. From 1854, in his weekly missives to Monsignor Kirby in Rome, he was referring to McHale simply as 'the Lion'. McHale, therefore, was bereft of any intermediary with the Holy See and most of his correspondence to Rome after the mid-1850's tended to be mere responses to the many complaints that were being made to Rome about himself.

Cardinal Cullen and Archbishop McHale were both conscientious servants of their Church. Their controversies were born out of the different vision each had for Ireland emerging from Penal Times. Cullen's stay in Rome had convinced him of the superiority of all things Roman. His new seminary in Clonliffe, he boasted would be very Roman, 'not like Maynooth'. Cullen would have been described therefore as belonging to the group called 'Ultramontane Bishops'. He had a strict adherence to strong discipline and centralised authority in the Church, and his unwillingness to tolerate local Irish customs and traditions was always a problem. These customs, like Stations and the celebration the Sacraments in the home, had kept the faith strong during Penal Days. In 1853 he could boast that Stations were now outlawed in the Dublin diocese, except 'in the mountainous districts.' In no case would he allow Stations in any area nearer than two miles to a church or chapel. He also introduced many forms of Continental devotional exercises. McHale, on the other hand, had come from a Maynooth which had many French Professors tinged with Gallicanism, a trend in the French Church which resisted over-domination by central Church authority.

McHale at The Vatican Council of 1870

John McHale made at least four journeys to Rome during his lifetime. The first was an extensive tour through much of Europe in 1832 when he was still co-adjutor Bishop of Killala. He also made *ad limina* visits in 1848 and in 1854. With hundreds of bishops from all over the world, he also attended the First Vatican Council in Rome in 1870, which had been called by Pope Pius IX. By that time, he had experienced many conflicts with the Roman authorities, having been constantly complained about by other bishops, especially Cardinal Cullen.

One salutary lesson of the whole controversy, perhaps a 'sign of the times' was that the Irish Church of the nineteenth century could comfortably co-exist with, and even thrive, in spite of these well-known disputes between Irish bishops, most notably demonstrated in the clashes already described between Archbishop Cullen of Dublin and Archbishop McHale. There was also the notorious disagreement he had with his eventual successor, Dr Mac Evilly, as related below.

And so, in Rome itself for the First Vatican Council of 1870, John McHale, with the sole support among the Irish bishops of Dr Moriarty of Kerry, opposed and voted '*non placet'* against the definition of the doctrine of Papal Infallibility.[39] Towards the close of the debate, McHale had contributed a speech lasting more than an hour, urging that some reference be made to the place of the bishops as the successors of the Apostles in the teaching of the church. It was a further mark of his independent spirit, which made him so feared in the episcopal college. He took this stance in the belief that a pronouncement on such a matter as Papal Infallibility was inopportune at that time. It was Wednesday 13 July, the closing day of the debate and of the six hundred bishops from all over the world, only eighty-eight voted *non placet*. Outside, the thunder was rolling and the forces of Victor Emmanuel were gathering for the final conquest of Rome.

However, once the doctrine was defined as a tenet of faith, being formally proclaimed by a General Council of the Church, John McHale characteristically assented in total obedience and faith and proclaimed it afterwards in Tuam Cathedral.

Diocesan Administration

In the Tuam diocesan archives there is an extraordinarily critical analysis of McHale's contribution to the work of the church in the diocese by one of his successors, Archbishop Joseph Walsh. The memorandum is undated but, because

of Dr Walsh's fifty years experience in administration, and his phenomenal knowledge of diocesan affairs, it is worth reproducing here:

> It is the custom for Irish enthusiasts to talk a lot about the splendid work done by Most Rev Dr McHale. However if anybody examines fully his work as Administrator of the Diocese, it seems to me there will not be much enthusiasm. His accounts were badly kept: in many cases money which was left for Masses was allowed to be diverted to a different purpose, with the result that great confusion has existed and in many cases I had to apply to Rome in order to set right the mess that had been made in regard to Masses. Even yet we know nothing about the money that is being paid to some parishes under the name of "Cathedral Debentures" and for which Masses are being celebrated.
>
> So far as evidence can be got, parochial books were not kept: for a very long period there is no record of Baptism, Marriages etc in the parishes. Neither in the working of the College nor the working of the parishes could he be put down as a model. I know myself from the old people that when Canon Grealy went to Newport about 1884, things were in a bad way. There were no schools; the people had no education and little knowledge of their religion.
>
> It was unfortunate that Dr. McHale tried to keep power up to the very last, and had his own nephew as Vicar General. It was unfortunate too that the relations between himself and Most Rev. Dr. MacEvilly were so bad. (See D'Alton's History).
>
> All I want to touch on here is that Dr. McHale's work as an archbishop has never been properly assessed; and before people begin to enthuse about his public activities, I think they ought to examine his whole administration. Even in regard to his attitude towards Newman and the Catholic University and his attitude to the National Schools no one, I think, will praise him enthusiastically.
>
> The Probate of Dr. McHale's will was £5,244 odd. If any bishop in Ireland at the present time died having this amount as probate, it would cause a lot of talk; but the case, I think, is worse if one considers the value of money at that time compared with the present time and the poverty in Ireland from 1845 onwards.
>
> Out of this Probate a sum of £575. 2. 10 was for rents due on land. It seems that Dr. Mac Hale had hundreds of acres of land throughout the county for his personal use. So

> far as I know, this land went to Fr Thomas Mac Hale, and through him to the Vincentians. A Vincentian Priest spoke to me on one occasion about this. These facts will explain the last public letter written by Dr. Mac Hale in 1879, which was directed against the Land League.[40]

Archbishop Walsh adds, in a hand-written note, that Dr McHale was 'a real despot and would have no opinion except his own. I write these notes' he said, 'without the smallest prejudice and for the sake of truth and exact history'. In a later document, dated 1939, he says that he had reason to study more deeply the affairs of John McHale. He discovered that, in 1855, Dr. McHale had purchased from the Encumbered Estates Court, with the help of a loan, four estates in the south of Co. Galway and that he had been in receipt of rents on two of those, at Derryheyna and Fairyhill near Portumna, totalling 1,233 acres, up to the time of his death.[41]

It is not known what motivated Dr McHale in this enormous purchase. It is known, however, that McHale was always conscious of how the Franchise Act of 1829 had restricted the franchise to £10 freeholders, rather than forty shillings as previously, and thereby discriminated against Catholics, the vast majority of whom were smallholders. McHale, by holding those estates, could create medium-size freeholds on long leases and thereby try to counteract these unjust measures. In a letter to Daniel O'Connell in April 1840 McHale had stated: 'while the franchise remained, there was yet hope for a peaceful assertion of our rights - take this away, and the people are left without any arms in their hands; and in this defenceless posture again ready for any experiment of slavery or despotism'. In fact, not until 1918 did all adults over 21 obtain the right to vote.

Perhaps, also, he had learned during the Great Famine the advantage of accessing some fund for regular relief of the poor. During the Great Famine, on account of his enormous reputation as a leader of the Irish people, he had received huge bequests and donations for the poor, which he disbursed faithfully. According to Fr Ulick Bourke, his first biographer, he recorded all these accounts in a special ledger. His nephew, Thomas McHale stated that, in all, he had disbursed the huge sum of over £78,093 during those years.[42]

And the nineteenth century was a century of recurring famines. A letter to *The Freeman's Journal* in 1863, for instance, from Fr Michael Curley, then curate in Roundstone says 'the distress is assuming alarming dimensions calculated to terrify the stoutest hearts.

> The most alarming aspect is the appearance of sickness among the poor, such as was witnessed in '46 and '47, the same swelling of the limbs, the same haggard looks, the same vacant glare in the eyes, the same worn skeleton frames. Although I have seen perhaps as much as any priest in Ireland of the fearful scenes of the famine of that period, yet it is with grief and sorrow I must confess that, in the course of my ministry to the sick for the last few days, I met some cases nearly as bad as any I then witnessed'.[43]

And famines re-occurred frequently after then, the last significant famine as late as the years 1878- 1880, just a few years before his death of John McHale. The archbishop had the reputation throughout his life of constantly handing out money to all and sundry and he was the every-day target of the many poor beggars then living around the town of Tuam.

He was extremely energetic all his life and his visits to parishes for Confirmation were hugely significant religious and social events. The Confirmations tended to be very large. In 1853, for instance, Archbishop McHale confirmed over one thousand candidates, adults and children, in the parish of Cong.

In his memorandum, Archbishop Joseph Walsh questioned McHale's capacity in dealing with canonical issues, the deployment and control of his priests and his failures to deal with souperism. One point that could be made in defence of McHale, however, is that McHale remained as archbishop until his ninetieth year and one could expect some shortcomings in administration in his later years. Also, there is the factor that he had never had a regular Secretary during his life and, until 1877, he did not even have a Vicar-General to assist him. Furthermore, almost all the documentation from his years as archbishop was removed shortly after his death, and the absence of files would inevitably make the work of successive administrators more difficult.

In contrast to this critical appraisal, we have the testimony of one who knew him personally. Within a year of McHale's death a priest of the diocese, Canon Ulick Bourke, MRIA, Parish Priest of Claremorris, wrote the first biography of the archbishop.[44] As a priest-teacher in the nearby college of St Jarlath's from 1858 to 1878, Ulick Bourke was in a position to know him well. Apparently, he was also related to McHale through his mother. He had been the President of the College from 1865 to 1878 and seems to have been a close associate of the archbishop. While the biography may be over indulgent towards McHale, it has many insights from first-hand observation of his character. Ulick Bourke wrote

the biography, he says, in response to many requests because 'no panegyric was preached at McHale Month's Mind Mass'. It appears that a Month's Mind Mass of a bishop at the time was a very formal occasion. The Catholic Directory for 1879 records the Month's Mind Mass of Cardinal Cullen, a year earlier. The 'panegyric' was almost a mini-biography, delivered by a Fr Burke, and it ran to over thirty pages. It was delivered in the presence of a highly decorated tiered catafalque carrying an 'untenanted coffin'.

The absence of the panegyric for McHale was undoubtedly caused by the rather strained relationship with his successor. The admirers of Archbishop McHale however, being aware of the custom and, feeling that somebody who did not know Dr McHale would undoubtedly take on the task of a biography, believed it was better that one who had known him intimately for twenty-one years and 'knew his very thoughts' should write his life story. This, Dean Ulick Bourke said, prompted the compiling of his biography.

Fr Burke's account of the archbishop's normal day was as follows:

> In his private life, Dr McHale was simplicity itself. As a rule he arose at six in the morning and made his meditation and recited the canonical hours. He offered Holy Mass in the cathedral, usually at eight o'clock. He celebrated every day for the last sixteen years of his life, before that time only three times in the week. Daily Mass had not then been so much the custom in Ireland, as it is at present. He studied until twelve o'clock or one. Occasionally he indulged in a walk after breakfast. He took a drive in the middle of the day from one to three in the afternoon; wrote letters till five o'clock, dined always at five, and then read the daily papers; recited the divine office at eight o'clock. After coffee, he conversed for a time, and at nine read a portion of Butler's *Lives of the Saints*. He retired to rest usually at ten o'clock. Such, generally speaking, was the routine of his daily life, broken at times by the arrival of guests or friends, to whom he extended as became a bishop, the right to hospitality.
>
> During Advent and Lent his fasts and acts of mortification were always excessive. Whenever he became ill, it happened commonly that his illness arose from excessive fasting. For thirty years he was, at the end of each Lent, when the fasting days had passed by, unable to walk firmly owing to the emaciated condition of his fine frame from continued severe fasting and mortification. For eleven years after his consecration, he never ate meat in Lent.

The Death of John McHale

In his life he had been revered, loved and hated. He was, nevertheless, a great Irishman and Churchman, even if he had a complex personality. On his death on 7 November 1881, his old adversary, *The Times* of London, paid this tribute to him:

> 'As far back as the living memory of man extends, his name has been identified with the most stirring events in the political life of his country. All his energy, and all his talents had been devoted unsparingly to the moral and material welfare of his people. His successes were those of a strong man, and his mistakes those of an honest one. He earned the gratitude of his country for his sturdy fight for her liberties and independence for more than half a century; and the people of his own archdiocese did well to inscribe his statue : '*CONNACIA GRATA', CONNACHT FOREVER GRATEFUL.*.

The statue referred to was a remarkable affirmation of the affection in which he was held by ordinary lay-people. The life-size statue of the archbishop was erected in the Cathedral grounds during his very lifetime and still stands in his memory, now located to the left of the Cathedral entrance. For more than sixty years of the turbulent nineteenth century he had wielded his cudgel by way of letters to great leaders and in the public press, addressing every issue he saw which hindered the rights of Catholicism or the Irish nation.

Statue of John McHale by Sir Thomas Farrell, erected in 1875, at its original location in front of the Cathedral.

As Ulick Bourke noted, McHale had witnessed three rebellions, four famines, nine land agitations, the struggle for Emancipation in 1829, the struggle for primary education and the University education controversy in the 1850's. In the Repeal Movement he was almost second in command to Daniel O'Connell. From his early attacks on the early efforts of the British Government, through the Kildare Place Society, to introduce what he considered an alien

system of education, to later debates on such questions as the Ecclesiastical Titles Bill or tenants' rights, McHale was in the forefront of public debate and controversy. It made the name of 'John of Tuam' either hated or loved throughout the British Empire.

After more than a century, no other Irish bishop has been so well remembered. Many colleges, schools, streets and roads, even a sports stadium, still commemorate his name throughout the Archdiocese and the entire West. One Church, in fact, was planned in his honour, the Church of St Mary at Bofeenaun, in his native parish of Lahardane. Though the architect's plans nominated the proposed magnificent cut-stone building with a spire as the 'Church of Archbishop John McHale', the liturgical nicety was preserved and the Latin inscription in the commemorative plaque merely records that Bishop Naughton of Killala 'placed this foundation-stone in memory of the Most Illustrious, John McHale, Archbishop of Tuam in 1912'!

Perspective view by architect William H Byrne MRIA of the 'Dr McHale Memorial Church', Tubbernavine, Co Mayo.

Even as late as 1881, McHale still presided at the Liturgies of Holy Week. Towards the end of the year he was still going for a drive but, in late October, he weakened considerably and he had a peaceful death, surrounded by members of his family and the clergy of Tuam, on 7th November 1881.

No wonder that *The Freeman's Journal* of 8 November 1881, announcing McHale's death, had this to say about him:

A pillar has fallen in the temple. A tower has tottered to the ground in Israel'. Born in Penal Days, he lived to see shackle after shackle struck away. He saw three rebellions, a decade of Land agitation, more than one famine, the Tithe War, the struggle for Emancipation, the war against proselytism, the great Repeal movement, the stand-up fight between Religion and Godlessness, the national demand for Home Rule, and from the ripening moment of his intellectual manhood to the last moment of his life his hands, never wearied, were uplifted to the God of battles for blessings on and in aid of the cause of country and of creed. Lasting lustre has been shed on the ancient See of St Jarlath by the purity of his life, the brilliancy of his talents and his sterling principles. John of Tuam was an Agamemnon, king of men; stood towering head and shoulders over the crowd'.

ANOTHER 'SCHISM' IN TUAM
The Controversial Appointment of John Mac Evilly as Coadjutor Archbishop — 1875-81.

The retirement of a bishop from office was never contemplated in the 19th century and, indeed, rarely until late in the twentieth century. Old men struggled on, often with the help of an Auxiliary Bishop, or sometimes of a Co-adjutor Bishop who had right of succession. It was a system laden with problems. So, the attempted appointment of a Coadjutor to Archbishop McHale in 1878 became a public and notorious event in Irish ecclesiastical circles. Such a public confrontation would be unthinkable in modern times. Indeed when one considers the public contests that arose in the succession of archbishops in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, one can easily wonder at the quiet acquiescence of priests and people in the highly secretive appointment system in operation during the first half of the twentieth century.

In 1875, Archbishop John McHale, then in his eighty-fifth year, celebrated fifty years as a bishop. In a more humane world he might have been accorded the dignity of some ease through retirement. He had been consecrated as Co-adjutor Bishop in Killala in 1825 and had become its bishop for a short time before translating to Tuam in 1834. A golden jubilee as a bishop was something unique in the Catholic world, so the celebrations held in Tuam were spectacular. It was on this occasion that the McHale statue, which still survives, was erected in the Tuam Cathedral Grounds.

At this stage of his career McHale was truly an inspirational national hero in the eyes of his flock. To many Irish bishops, however, he had become somewhat of an embarrassment, because of his sprit of independence.

Shortly after the jubilee ceremonies, John McHale requested from the Holy See that a co-adjutor be appointed to assist him. He nominated his own nephew, Rev Thomas McHale, then a Professor in the Irish College, Paris, for the position. Naturally, Rome demurred, and so did his brother bishops!

Cardinal Cullen had opposed McHale on many matters of church policy, and for many years they had had a rather difficult relationship. For over twenty-five years now Cullen had been at the heart of all decision-making regarding the appointment of Irish bishops, acting almost as a Papal Nuncio would a century later. On almost every occasion, in searching for 'a good bishop', he was careful to promote the cause of candidates who would not become part of the faction led by Archbishop McHale.

Thomas McHale had headed the *terna* of candidates for Killala in 1861 but had not been appointed. Prior to that, in 1856, when Thomas McHale had been nominated by the Connaught bishops as a candidate for the see of Galway, Cardinal Cullen had carried out an investigation into his suitability. Cullen, as a former Rector of the Irish College in Rome, had known the young Thomas McHale as a student. His opinion of him was that 'he never demonstrated much ability but he was hard-working enough and succeeded in acquiring an extensive knowledge of theology'. He considered him however, 'of an irritable temperament, an intriguer, and full of party spirit'. Now in 1875, Cullen sought the opinion of the current Rector of the Irish College, Paris who gave as his opinion that, while he greatly desired that Thomas McHale would be removed from the college, he would view his promotion to the Episcopate as a true calamity for the Irish church. He believed that McHale had been at the bottom of every disagreement in the college and 'had been a thorn in the heart of the rector'.[45] Those were the opinions that Cullen had then conveyed to the head of the Congregation of *Propaganda Fide* at that time.

It was not likely therefore that Cardinal Cullen would now support him as a coadjutor archbishop of Tuam - even if he had not been the nephew of the incumbent. Incidentally, the same document displays Cullen's verdict on the other candidate for Galway at that time, namely John MacEvilly. It is obvious that

Cullen did not know him at that time, but he had received a report that 'he enjoyed the esteem of being an excellent priest', much given to study and hard work and 'although in immediate contact with Archbishop McHale, yet he has always kept quiet and has never taken part in the political agitation'.

After the meeting of the Connacht bishops in 1875, McHale wrote to Cardinal Cullen of Dublin on 23 July, asking his support for the course of action he had proposed in regard to the succession. His ideas were, of course, not very welcome.[46]

Bishop John MacEvilly of Galway then was the person favoured by many of the bishops, including Cardinal Cullen, for the position in Tuam. Born in Bunowen, Louisburgh, Co Mayo he was ordained as a priest of the archdiocese of Tuam. He was, however, no favourite of the then incumbent, the great John McHale. MacEvilly's eventual accession in 1881 was, therefore, heralded by five years of controversy between them, much of it very public.

McHale's request for a Co-adjutor was refused by Rome, on the stated grounds of McHale's 'vigorous health'. However, in December of 1875, McHale wrote again but *Propaganda Fide* still delayed. In early 1876 he was requested to carry out the normal process of election and selection and, after it was completed, to send in the *terna,* the normal panel of three candidates. John McHale did not expect, and certainly did not welcome, an election.

The archbishop had, in the meantime, advanced the claims of his nephew further by recalling him from the Irish College in Paris and appointing him as Vicar-General of the diocese, the first Vicar General he had ever appointed. It was well known that McHale had created great astonishment in1873 by appointing another nephew, Fr Richard McHale, as Parish Priest of Claremorris, only nine years after his ordination. The idea of another McHale, Thomas, in charge of such a large diocese as Tuam sent shock-waves through the minds of the other bishops of Connaught. Each of them were prominent individuals: Bishops Gillooly of Elphin, Duggan of Clonfert and, his neighbour in Galway, Bishop John MacEvilly himself. These, with Cardinal Cullen and others, looked forward to the end of the McHale dynasty and, if possible, the successful appointment of Bishop MacEvilly to the archdiocese of Tuam.

Throughout 1876 many Irish bishops opposed to McHale, including Cardinal Cullen of Dublin, were writing to Monsignor Kirby at the Irish College in Rome,

the known conduit to the Roman *Curia*. Cardinal Cullen in particular gave grave accounts of the lack of control by McHale over his priests and rampant indiscipline in the diocese. All letters received by Monsignor Kirby from Irish bishops were carefully filed and are now in the archives of the Irish College in Rome. The extensive correspondence in regard to the controversial appointment has been collated by Padraig Ó Tuairisg and is extensively used in this account.[47]

Anybody but MacEvilly!

It became clear to McHale that the proposal in regard to his nephew would not be acceptable. However, he was determined to block the accession of Bishop Mac Evilly of Galway at all costs.

Dr John Mac Evilly had been ordained priest by McHale himself and had been favoured by him in his early years by his appointment as a professor and later President of the diocesan seminary, St. Jarlath's. MacEvilly, for instance, had accompanied the archbishop as his theological expert at the Synod of Thurles in 1850. Ironically, the other expert on that occasion was none other than Thomas McHale, now his rival for the archbishopric in 1876. MacEvilly had espoused many of the nationalist campaigns of John McHale in the 1850's. He attended, for instance, a Tenant Rights meeting in Claremorris in January 1855. However, when he was promoted to Galway in 1857, he rapidly came under the wing of Cardinal Cullen and became more and more distant from his metropolitan, John McHale.

For almost twenty years now they had clashed on many matters of church policy. By 1863 the relations with his archbishop had become strained. This can be gleaned from a series of letters between them in connection with an appeal to McHale by the notorious Galway priest-entrepreneur, Fr Peter Daly, against his suspension following a long-running dispute with his bishop, Dr MacEvilly. That McHale should have accepted the appeal at all annoyed the Bishop of Galway, as the matter had, substantially, already been decided by Rome. The only extra matter introduced included a rather specious one, a disagreement about the storage of lime in Barna church! The correspondence, while remaining civil at all times, indicates a formal tone, almost suggesting that McHale revelled in the opportunity to leave his colleague guessing about what his 'decision' would be. MacEvilly had warned him in a letter of 17 August 1863 that if His Grace had been aware of the true circumstances of the case he would never have accepted the appeal, particularly as 'the principal part had already been judged by the Holy

See.' In the event, McHale's 'decision', as communicated to Dr MacEvilly and to Fr Peter Daly, was quite ambivalent. It was interpreted by MacEvilly as follows: 'the decision, while apparently in my favour at first sight, is really against me, and it will be regarded as most likely it was intended to be so by the adherents of Fr Peter'.[48] Dr MacEvilly immediately appealed to Rome against McHale's ruling. The outcome was that the suspension of Fr Daly by Dr MacEvilly was upheld.

Now in 1876, John McHale, in a move which would be abhorrent in modern church circles, publicly sent voting guidelines to the parish priests of the diocese, just a few days before the meeting of priests for the election. Even more alarmingly, the letter was published on 17th August 1876 in the main national daily of the time, *The Freeman's Journal*. He exhorted the priests not to consider any other bishop for translation to Tuam. Without saying so explicitly, he was in fact warning against the elevation of Bishop MacEvilly of Galway.

Their relationship therefore, while always correct, was never warm. It did not improve when Bishop MacEvilly absented himself from the Tuam Jubilee of 1875 and organised a clergy Retreat for Galway priests at the same time. McHale mentioned this slight on his character in a formal letter to Propaganda Fide in 1879 when outlining his many objections to MacEvilly being granted faculties as a Co-adjutor.[49] When that letter became public and was given enduring form in Bernard O'Reilly's biography of John McHale, published twelve years later, MacEvilly denied this was meant as a snub. In a draft letter in the Tuam archives MacEvilly says that the person conducting the said Retreat, the Bishop of Kildare, had at the time wished to deny the rumour, but that MacEvilly had dissuaded him as he looked on it as 'a mere ephemeral matter, hardly worth attending to'.[50]

The Election and the Aftermath

In his official address to the priests before the election of a possible co-adjutor, McHale argued, with some justification, that a man already used to acting as a bishop would be unsuitable as an assistant bishop and, particularly as a co-adjutor bishop who would have right of succession. Such a one would have his own style of working and would therefore not be amenable to the archbishop's control. This, he felt, would make his own position untenable.

This was the time when the *terna*, or the names of three priests were voted on by

the parish priests of the diocese and forwarded to Rome. They were graded in order of perceived worthiness, starting with the chosen one as *dignissimus* — the most worthy. Frequently the result of those votes were contentious, made more so by the fact that they were open secrets.

In this case, the meeting of parish priests took place in the Cathedral after High Mass in August 1876. Outside, a terrific thunderstorm was blowing. The doors were shut and the laity were expelled. Nevertheless, *The Ballinrobe Chronicle* of 19 August, recorded that Dr McHale, in his address to the parish priests, laid stress on the danger of selecting bishops whose views were known to be opposed to those of the Metropolitan.

The election was held. Forty-four priests were entitled to vote. 'Scrutators' were appointed by vote and the result of the election was made public: Bishop Mac Evilly obtained sixteen votes and Rev. Thomas McHale twelve votes. The third candidate, Dr Thomas Carr of Maynooth, (who later became Archbishop of Melbourne) received nine. Four other candidates secured a total of four votes. [51] Clearly the diocese was divided. The old archbishop taking heart, however, from the twelve votes secured by his nephew, now renewed his call for support for him, despite his having almost abandoned such a hope in the previous months.

In August 1876 McHale wrote to Cardinal Cullen requesting his support for Thomas McHale. Obviously he could see nothing unusual in his promoting his own nephew for the post. He was mindful, no doubt, that Cullen's nephew, Dr Patrick Francis Moran, later Cardinal Moran of Sydney, who had been for many years Cullen's secretary, had been appointed Co-adjutor Bishop of Ossory just a few years earlier.

In his reply of 26 August, Cardinal Cullen politely but pointedly referred to McHale's public letter to the priests of the previous July. Cullen firmly rejected the notion that a serving bishop must be excluded from consideration. McHale, in his reply, pleaded that he could not accept Dr MacEvilly as 'he had taken care to manifest his hostility to me'. Apart from his objection to Dr MacEvilly, he said he had had no wish to interfere with the decision of the clergy in their voting. Indeed their pattern of voting on the day showed that, in fact, he had not interfered. He was now contemplating the idea of his going directly to Rome, 'either to secure Dr Thomas McHale's election or to exclude the Bishop of Galway'. However if he could persuade himself that such a trip was unnecessary

in regard to the Bishop of Galway, or useless as regards Dr Thomas McHale, he 'would remain at home as a choice between the other two candidates can be made by letter'.

Bishop Gillooly of Elphin, writing to Monsignor Kirby on 7 September 1876, gave an account of the all-important meeting of the Connaught bishops in Tuam, held to consider the result of the vote of the parish priests of the diocese. McHale, he said, had immediately proposed that a Secretary be brought in. When this was not agreed, Dr McHale wished to close the meeting *re infecta* — with nothing decided. As this proposal was not agreed either, McHale then stated openly that Dr MacEvilly of Galway, who was present at the meeting, was not acceptable to him as Co-adjutor. Mac Evilly, with the permission of the assembled bishops, then left the room. It is clear from the letter that Gillooly was supporting Mac Evilly, as were the other bishops of the province.

Dr McHale was invited to dine with Cardinal Cullen in Dublin on 9th September 1876. He accepted the invitation, the first time in twenty years, according to Cullen. Also present was Cardinal Franchi, Prefect of the *Propaganda Fide* Congregation, who was visiting Ireland, no doubt with a special interest in the doings in Tuam. He remarked in passing to Cullen that he was surprised that McHale was so 'very stout'. Naturally he had never seen his image before, as was understandable in these days before photography. Now officially, McHale again openly stated to the Cardinals that he would never consent to have Dr Mac Evilly assigned to him as Co-adjutor. He gave a letter to that effect to Cardinal Franchi.

Many Letters to Rome

Cullen's private letters to his friend Monsignor Kirby at the Irish College in Rome betray a great antipathy to John McHale. In a letter of December 1876 he wrote 'during all his episcopate he has always been in opposition to the views of the Holy See'. In a further letter a few weeks later, in January 1877, he wrote that 'the drunken priests in Tuam are very numerous' and these men were generally opposed to Dr MacEvilly 'as they think he would be severe on drunkenness'. Dr MacEvilly himself also wrote to Monsignor Kirby in a similar vein, stating that Tuam priests were frequently denouncing each other in public.

Archbishop McHale, of course, robustly denied these charges when they were relayed to him by Rome in early in 1877. In a detailed reply in Latin among McHale's mss, and quoted in Bernard O'Reilly's biography of the archbishop, McHale wrote 'my priests do not give way to such recriminations, at least in

public, and should they do so, they would not fail to be chastised'. In a further comment he wrote that such unsubstantiated charges should not deny him being sent 'a co-adjutor, or at least an assistant bishop, grateful and acceptable to me, or let me simply resign my charge'.[52]

During a visit to Rome, Dr Thomas McHale learned from conversations at a high level that a middle course was now being contemplated — an auxiliary bishop rather than a co-adjutor might be assigned to Tuam and he might be that man. This decision was later abandoned, no doubt under the influence of three of the bishops of Connaught on their *ad limima* visit to Rome in 1877.

The Appointment - and the slow Accession

Eventually, on 7 January 1878, *Propaganda Fide*, which was then in charge of episcopal appointments in Ireland, made the appointment of Dr John Mac Evilly as Co-Adjutor Archbishop of Tuam. Just a few days earlier, McHale had, in a letter to Cardinal Manning of Westminster, re-stated his objections to Bishop MacEvilly in even stronger terms than ever before:

> Of all the ecclesiastics of the province, there is none more obnoxious to me, as he has uniformly showed himself to be my most inveterate personal enemy. I cannot by any means consent to have him.[53] ,

The decision to appoint John MacEvilly was arrived at after a lot of consideration and only by a vote within *Propaganda Fide.* As a concession to the ageing McHale, it was decided that the announcement of the appointment would not be made during the archbishop's lifetime.

Bishop MacEvilly wrote a conciliatory letter to McHale from Galway on 7 February 1878.[54]

> I think it right to assure Your Grace with all sincerity (and I hope time may convince you of it) that I am prepared to show Your Grace on all occasions, public and private, the deep respect and veneration due to your years, rank and long services. Whenever you may think of it to call on my cooperation I shall be always ready to assist as you may desire. I shall be happy to wait on Your Grace to present the Letter Apostolic whenever you may desire it.
>
> Your Grace's faithful servant
> + John MacEvilly.

So the appointment was to be a secret one and therefore depended completely on the goodwill of Dr McHale to issue regular invitations to Dr MacEvilly to come to his assistance. As this proved impracticable, the decision about secrecy was later countermanded. Any hope that a cosy relationship might be imposed and that a secret appointment might work towards peace and harmony was clearly misplaced.

The absence of a policy of retirement for bishops, and indeed for parish priests, in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, often created frustration and difficult inter-personal relationships between the official incumbent and any person appointed to assist him. This tension was compounded in the case of a bishop where the assistant bishop appointed was not acceptable and, especially, if he was appointed as a Co-adjutor with right of succession. Inevitably, priests of the diocese could find themselves on one side or the other. In Tuam the inter-regnum was a time of exceptional tension in this delicate but hostile inter-play between two prelates who displayed such a clash of personalities. MacEvilly promised privately, writing to Kirby on receipt of his appointment in January 1878, that 'I will be as respectful and submissive to him as one of his curates. I will never say a disparaging word of His Grace whatever my secret views may be'.

In the event, apparently, Mac Evilly continued to live as Bishop of Galway and, because of the form of the appointment and the delicacy of the situation, initially could spend little of his time in Tuam. Mac Evilly however, kept up his reports on the conditions in Tuam, as he perceived them. In March of 1878, MacEvilly confided to Cardinal Cullen that some of the students of St Jarlath's College received revolvers and that 'a great part of Mayo was eaten up with Fenianism'. His Grace, he said, was 'perambulating this diocese and the newspapers give flaming accounts of his activity and energy'.

In August 1878 the kindly Archbishop of Armagh, Dr McGettigan, wrote to say he was asked by Rome to visit Dr McHale in Tuam to try to resolve difficulties.[55] He visited him and was apparently touched by the case put up by the old man. His subsequent advice to Rome was one of caution, that perhaps the execution of the co-adjutorship might be postponed. He became convinced over a period that Dr Mac Evilly was determined to move to Tuam almost by force of arms, *' vi et armis'*, as he put it. In his own opinion, the clergy of the diocese of Tuam were 'distinguished by their priestly virtues and untiring in their ministering to the

faithful the heavenly food of the Gospel'.[56] Archbishop Croke of Cashel was happy to report to Monsignor Kirby in October 1878 that 'the Tuam case is going on quietly, the Lion, (McHale) is not likely to roar'. But on the ground, thing were not so easy.

For another twelve months Rome was still receiving reports from Ireland about conditions in Tuam. An unusual level of leadership was required at that particular time, as the west of Ireland was going through great difficulties because of agrarian atrocities, widespread famine and the foundation of the Land League.

Dr MacEvilly's letters to Rome and to other bishops all have a note of frustration. He was not even called on to carry out Confirmations when he was the obvious replacement for the ailing prelate.[57] 'I am sufficiently trampled on already' he said, ' by not being allowed to remedy some glaring abuses for which souls are eternally lost and soon will become irremediable. I certainly will protest against such treatment and call for redress from the Holy See'. Later, on 29 April 1879, he referred to Clifden where he said 'the faith is going fast, a giddy young priest called Rhatigan is charged with disturbance in relation to Mitchel Henry MP and a Protestant minister.[58] 'The poor old archbishop', Mac Evilly wrote to Kirby on 20 July 1879, was 'a mere automaton in the hands of a party....there is nothing under the sun like what is going on in Tuam. The poor archbishop is a perfect non-entity, dragged about here and there and everything magnified in the papers, without a particle of truth. The condition of Mayo is such, that a generation of archbishops will never remedy'.

The Land Question

The public, however, were not too aware of the struggle. So there was some success in whatever strategies the two bishops and the clergy employed to downplay, in public, the disagreements and the canonical disarray that existed. This may be gleaned from, among other things, the very public stance that was taken in relation to the land agitation which had gripped the west of Ireland in 1879.

On 5 June 1879, a mystifying letter had appeared in the *Freeman's Journal*, allegedly from the patriot Archbishop McHale, equivalently denouncing the current land agitation. The truth is, of course, that Archbishop McHale was himself a landowner of no small proportions. He had purchased in 1855, through a loan, a number of estates in the Encumbered Estates Court and at his death he

still retained two estates in south Co Galway of almost 1,233 acres.[59] These estates passed, on his death, to his nephew Thomas McHale. This alone may explain in part the opposition in Tuam to Land League activities. However, it is widely assumed that the letter opposing the Land League emanated from Thomas McHale rather than the archbishop himself.

Another letter, also allegedly from McHale, dated 7 July 1879, was published in local newspapers. It was addressed to the secretaries of a proposed land agitation meeting in Ballyhaunis and referred to new self-appointed leaders who were described as 'a group of strolling men who affected grief, deploring the condition of the tenantry'. This reference deeply offended Michael Davit who replied to it, in some pain, in the *Connaught Tele*graph of 12 July 1879. At the time the priests of the diocese had, uncharacteristically, been staying away from land agitation meetings. The editor of the *Connaught Telegraph*, the great nationalist James Daly, was in no doubt as to the source from which those missives emanated. In his editorial for the issue of 12 July 1879 he wrote trenchantly as follows:

> The editor of *The Tuam News* has asked why have the priests of the diocese not appeared on the platform to plead for the occupier of the soil. We will answer him. The reason is they are not free. The rights of citizenship have been taken from them. No doubt they sympathise as deeply as ever with the tenant, but a single individual with what authority we know not, claims the right to put them to silence. Yes the Rev Thomas McHale, DD, is a stranger to this diocese. Having passed most of his life abroad, he has lately turned up as the Vicar-General of Tuam. A reactionary in principle, he has no respect for individual liberty and he claims to direct, not only the religious, but the political opinions of those over whom he asserts jurisdiction. If the editor of The *Tuam News* would only use his influence with Dr McHale junior to restrain him from writing coercive letters to priests on political matters, there would be no further occasion to comment upon the absence of the priests from the side of the tillers of the soil. ….. It is not long since he called an esteemed clergyman to account for having attended a political meeting and another rev. gentleman has been taken to task for having written a letter on the Land Question. Until quite recently this state of things was unknown in the diocese of Tuam. The Archbishop never attempted to coerce his priests on matters unconnected with religion. But unfortunately, His Grace, owing to the natural decay of years, is no longer able to perform the functions of his high and sacred position. These functions now it would appear, devolve on his nephew, the Vicar-General.

Apparently the outburst had the desired effect, for on the following Sunday, at Claremorris, a monstrous land agitation meeting was attended by 20,000 people and on the platform were no less than twelve priests of the diocese, led by the Parish Priest of Claremorris, Canon Ulick Bourke, who amidst applause, was 'moved to the chair'. Ulick Bourke was a great admirer of the archbishop. He acknowledged that the absence of the priests on the platforms at meetings for the previous six months was due 'to some misunderstanding'! James Daly, in his speech, said he was delighted that priests and people were once again so united. It appears that from the day of this meeting at Claremorris the Land Movement really took off.

Meanwhile, Dr MacEvilly was constantly writing to Rome to Monsignor Kirby. Over the years 1877-1879 Kirby had replied to MacEvilly in several letters of comfort, constantly urging prayerful acceptance and the promotion of peace. On 25 August 1879, MacEvilly repeated that, under the present administration, whatever he would recommend would be sure to be countermanded. 'It is piteous to see the poor old man, hardly able to walk, and intellect impaired, dragged about the country, banners, arches etc got up to amuse him like a child -and no good done'. The reported Apparition of Our Lady at Knock on 21 August 1879, he said, caused him much concern on how he should act. However, Archbishop McHale himself (or his nephew!) quickly set up a Commission of Enquiry.

Rome Intervenes

At last, in late August 1879, Rome was determined to act in the matter of the succession. As faculties of jurisdiction were still being refused by Dr McHale, Rome sent faculties directly to Dr MacEvilly. He was now instructed to move to Tuam and take up his duties as Co-adjutor Archbishop.

Such a confrontational move was bound to find a response in the indomitable John McHale. He immediately wrote to the new Secretary of *Propaganda Fide* as follows:

> Two years ago I asked the Holy See to grant me a coadjutor. After some explanatory communications I received an answer saying that I should call my clergy together to select men worthy of the episcopal office. I did so, and transmitted to the Holy See the names of the men thus chosen. I declared, moreover, that I should be satisfied with any one of the four priests voted for by the clergy, but that I could not accept the Bishop of Galway, who was openly and notoriously hostile to me. Of this there is evident

proof in the fact that, during the solemn celebration of my episcopal jubilee, this bishop was unwilling to show me honour by word or act of his, but, moreover, held a spiritual retreat for his clergy during these very days, and thus practically prevented them from joining the provincial clergy, a great proportion of whom by their presence and acts enhanced the solemn festivities.

On this conduct of the Bishop of Galway much was then published by the Irish, English, and American journals. Notwithstanding all this, by the advice and persuasion of a most eminent personage of whom I do not at present wish to say more, the Bishop of Galway was chosen as my coadjutor, with this precautionary clause, however, that the name of the person thus chosen should be kept secret during my life-time, unless some subsequent necessity should arise to demand its divulgation.

This decision was in no wise satisfactory to the persons who had been, in this business, so active in opposing me. Not long afterward reasons were invented to obtain the publication of the decree. Accusations were trumped up against my clergy and against my administration, which tended to show openly that, as my enemies judged, I was unable to govern my diocese.

I met such of these accusations as were utterly false by a peremptory denial, others, which were exaggerated, as I explained away; such as were at all true I admitted to be so. For there is no diocese exempt from faults and errors.

But the Sacred Congregation preferred to give credit to my enemies rather than to my explanations; and thus it comes to pass that a bishop is to be given me as my coadjutor to whom I can delegate no part of my authority. It is one thing to wish for a helpmate on whom one looks with kindness; it is quite another to have to accept an open enemy.

Up to this time I have so discharged my episcopal functions that I deserved, some eighteen months ago, to receive the approving praise of the Sacred Congregation. With God's help, I shall in the future continue to fulfil the same duties.

If in spite of all this the Apostolic See wills to delegate to the Bishop of Galway the faculties for performing certain functions in the diocese of Tuam, then I shall at once seriously think of resigning the episcopal office and dignity; for I will never be associated with the Bishop of Galway.

> But, inasmuch as the resignation of a bishop is a thing of very rare occurrence, mine will excite surprise both among the clergy and among the people. It will thus become necessary for me to give a public explanation of my act. In the documents, which I shall thus give to the public in connection with this affair, I shall add nothing to the letters written by me or in my name to the Sacred Congregation. Historical truth and the necessity of my own reputation require that I should also make public everything in these letters which can throw light on this momentous transaction.

It was an extraordinary letter. 'I will never be associated with the Bishop of Galway....with God's help, I shall in the future continue to fulfil the same duties'. McHale had, equivalently, refused to obey the Holy See and threatened to resign and give his reasons in public, to boot. But Rome had made its stand.

Dr MacEvilly Makes his Move.

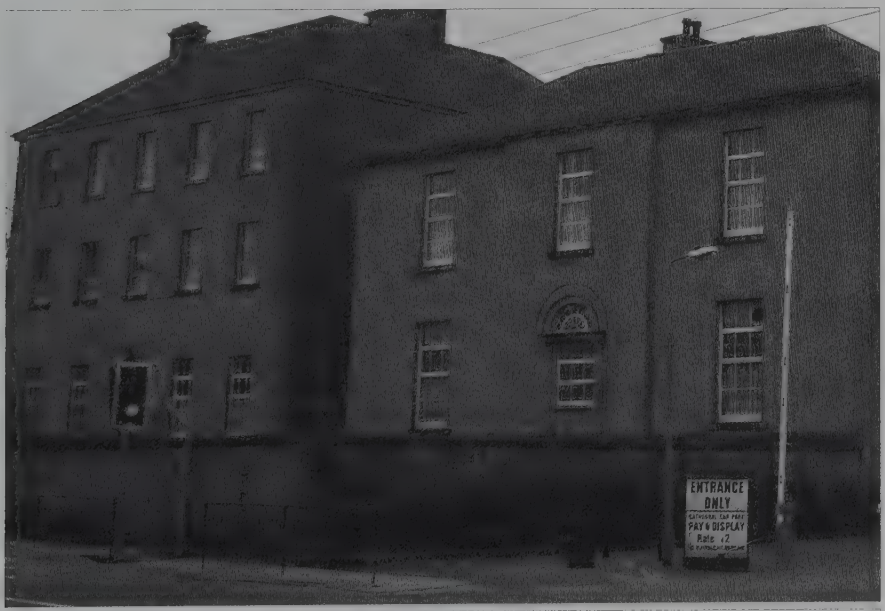
Dr MacEvilly however had to take notice of his clear appointment and the granting of faculties to rule the diocese. In this delicate situation he wrote to Archbishop McHale.[60]

> Galway,
> 27 August 1879.
>
> My dear Lord Archbishop,
>
> The annexed letter enclosed are the documents sent to me by the Holy See containing the faculties, ordinary and extraordinary, together with a mandate to proceed to assist Your Grace in the administration and government of the diocese of Tuam.
>
> I shall have the honour of waiting on you in a day or two. I also deem it right to repeat the assurances I gave to you on 7 February 1878 to the effect that, while obeying the mandate of the Hoy See, nothing shall be wanted to exhibit the respect and reverence due to your exalted rank, years and long services to country and religion.

There is no record of a reply to this letter. Mac Evilly proceeded to Tuam where he took up residence in the Old College section of St Jarlath's on Bishop St. The building is, of course, the nearest building to the then 'Bishop's Palace' where McHale resided. But he was never invited next door by the ailing archbishop to discuss matters relating to the diocese.

Writing to Kirby on 1 September 1879, MacEvilly describes his attempt to see Dr McHale, now almost two years after his official appointment. Dr Mac Evilly went to see the archbishop but was instead escorted to 'the lower parlour', where he spoke for one and a half hours to Dr Thomas McHale only, who was polite and civil. He told him that His Grace would not see him but, whatever message Dr Mac Evilly had would be conveyed to the archbishop, who would be no obstacle. When asked if this included Confirmations, Dr McHale would only advise that Dr Mac Evilly might 'use his own judgment' in using his new faculties but was warned that, if necessary, the archbishop would resign and would state his reasons publicly. Apparently, in the nineteenth century such a threat of resignation was tantamount to scandalous rebellion and was to provide the incumbent with a formidable whiphand.

For the next two years the two archbishops, who never met each other in this span of time, each maintained a certain tenuous position in the diocese. Dr McHale did not in fact resign his See but continued as usual to perform his daily duties, including, it appears, even some parish visitations. Mac Evilly did subsequently carry out an intensive visitation of Connemara in October of that year and was



Home of Dr McHale on right.
Dr MacEvilly lived in adjoining 'Old College' of St Jarlath's.

well received. He saw many defects needing immediate remedy, particularly in the inactivity of some of the priests and a general shortage of priests there. He just hoped that the Archbishop would not oppose his intended changes.

As Mac Evilly was still Bishop of Galway, he depended on Galway for his maintenance. He suggested through Kirby on 17 October 1879 that he might be given the parish of Dunmore, which, he said, thinking in terms of transport by horse-carriage, was 'only one and a quarter hour's distance from Tuam.' There he could set an example to other parish priests. Nothing, apparently, came of this for eighteen months and by that time it was too late.

As Archbishop McHale continued to ignore his existence, Mac Evilly sent for Dr Thomas McHale on two occasions. He came to see him in St Jarlath's College but none of his suggestions were, apparently, attended to. 'I am a mere cipher here', he wrote in 11 Dec 1879. Dr McHale had, apparently, written to Maynooth asking them to provide a bishop to carry out ordinations for him.

A long meeting took place with Dr Thomas McHale on 30 December 1879. A private memo of the agenda, in MacEvilly's hand, is retained in the diocesan archives. The items included: accounts, appointment of curates, proselytism in Connemara and the protection of Dr MacEvilly's rights, which had been given to him on 15 August previously. He affirmed that he was granted 'all the ordinary and extraordinary faculties enjoyed by the archbishop'. This therefore included the right to confirm and ordain. He had had to caution Maynooth, who wrote to him on this topic, that 'the function to ordain priests belonged to him, and nobody can perform the function but me'. Another memo of the meeting in MacEvilly's tiny handwriting on his beloved dark blue notepaper is almost indecipherable.[61] The meeting covered many points but, apparently, little agreement was found. In regard to right to ordinations, for example, it was conceded that while Dr Mac Evilly did, indeed, have the right, the archbishop, 'while not objecting, would not approve'. Dr McHale suggested that he write to Rome to seek their views.

From stray pointers in diocesan documents, it appears that Mac Evilly was gradually taking control throughout the year of 1880, dealing with correspondence from priests and taking corrective action where he deemed it necessary. A significant news item in the *Ballinrobe Chronicle* for 3 July 1880 praised the new Co-adjutor for implementing a new arrangement for Sunday

Mass throughout the diocese. Henceforth the latest Mass in parishes would be at 11am -'a most prudent and popular innovation in that it would spare the poor sacrificing hard-working and energetic priests of unnecessary harassing and killing labour.'

In an aside from Monsignor Kirby, however, we learn that MacEvilly had again angered McHale by purporting to call a joint retreat of the Galway and Tuam priests in July 1880, a practice unknown in the past. In November of that year MacEvilly wrote several letters to the Parish Priest of his native Louisburgh, taking strong action against him and his curate for their handling of a local dispute connected with the famine aid then being distributed during the famine of that year. He ordered the Parish Priest on 7 November 1880 to defend religion by confronting a local Land League activist who had created an affray in Louisburgh church and stood up to the Parish Priest. In the event the man was charged with 'disorderly conduct during Divine service' but was acquitted after an apology.[62]

In March 1881, things were obviously in a difficult state again for, in a letter of 2 March 1881, MacEvilly wrote to Dr Thomas McHale who had claimed that there were certain 'powers reserved by the Archbishop'. MacEvilly pointed out that on 13 May 1880 full faculties had been transferred to him by the Pope, and therefore 'they do not depend on what His Grace gives or withholds'. He objected to the idea of these powers being 'shared' as suggested, as this would be impossible in practice. 'I mean to continue exercising the ordinary and delegated faculties in the diocese of Tuam, as in Galway'. He agreed with Dr McHale's general views regarding scandal, 'only they are not to the point in the present case. There is a question of public and notorious scandal in disobeying the mandate of the Holy See, solemnly enjoined on a bishop of the obedience due to the Vicar of Christ. I shall manage to have the subject you speak of substantially embodied in the subjects for the priests' Conference. What I complained of was that this was done in contravention of my undoubted right'. He had read of McHale's proposed agenda in *The Tuam News*!

However by 1881, Archbishop McHale, now in his ninetieth year, was becoming ever more frail. For instance he had to be carried to his carriage whenever he left his house. The lot of the Co-adjutor then was becoming a little more normalised. In July of that year MacEvilly was given some financial security by being given the parish of Dunmore. Interestingly, the Catholic Directory for the year 1881 would seem to indicate that Tuam did not formally recognise its co-adjutor

bishop. The list of personnel for Tuam, presumably submitted by Thomas McHale, omits all reference both to the Co-Adjutor, John Mac Evilly and to Thomas McHale as Vicar-General

Bernard O'Reilly, McHale's biographer, in his account of the archbishop's last year, says that nobody, not even his sister Barbara, who was his housekeeper, 'was ever allowed to read into the archbishop's countenance any trace of the emotion caused by the presence in Tuam of the man against whom he had so strongly protested and no one ever heard from his lips a word derogatory to Christian charity'.

ARCHBISHOP JOHN MacEVILLY, 1881- 1902

By church law, on the death of Archbishop McHale in November 1881, the co-adjutor, John MacEvilly, immediately became Archbishop of Tuam. The arrangements for the funeral however were a matter for the family, and particularly for his nephew Dr Thomas McHale who had, up to the time of his death, been also the Vicar-General of the diocese. A room in the archbishop's residence on Bishop Street had been converted into a mortuary chapel for the lying-in-state and the Office for the Dead and several Masses were offered there as crowds came to show their respect. A lengthy, eleven page account of the eight days of mourning is contained in the Monsignor O'Reilly's biography.

The obsequies of the great John McHale in the Cathedral on 15 November were the most impressive Tuam had ever seen. The extant photograph of the elevated catafalque in the Cathedral, bearing the coffin of the archbishop, surrounded by candles and wreaths, bears witness to the solemnity of the occasion. Dr MacEvilly himself was the Celebrant at the High Mass and a vast congregation, including nine bishops and 300 priests as well as prominent statesmen 'and thousands of worshippers', came together in Tuam.

Funeral Ceremonies of Archbishop McHale, Tuam Cathedral, November 1881.

On the death of a bishop a Vicar-General immediately loses his position, so Dr Thomas McHale was henceforth merely a family member taking care of the archbishop's personal effects. The days after the death were therefore particularly sensitive both for the new archbishop and for Dr Thomas McHale. Significantly, he did not act either as deacon or sub-deacon at the High Mass for his uncle. He is merely referred to in newspaper accounts as one of the chief mourners along with his brother-in-law, Thomas Higgins, a solicitor. The archbishop's grand-nephew however, Fr John McHale, acted as sub-deacon at the Mass. *The Connaught Telegraph,* in reporting the funeral, expressed some surprise that there was no panegyric preached at the Funeral Mass. It surmised that this might have been due to the fact that the famous priest-orator, Fr Tom Burke, was indisposed or, perhaps, it may have been decided to postpone such a eulogy to the Month's Mind Mass. The truth, however, may be that the new archbishop wished to avoid any semblance of controversy about his relationship with the deceased archbishop and his nephew.[63]

Writing to Kirby on 19 November 1881, a few days after the magnificent obsequies in the Cathedral, John Mac Evilly said: 'it is all over now, and Heaven knows what I have suffered in silence to prevent scandal and exposure which was threatened. Since the poor old man's death, I have acted as if he were my greatest friend, and mean to so do until after the month's mind'. Presumably he was referring to the severe process of reforms that he was about to carry out throughout the diocese.

Thomas McHale wrote to Dr MacEvilly on 18 Nov 1881 enclosing a cheque for £1,031.12.4 for certain moneys due for charities and said: 'the archives are at your disposal. Let me add, however, that there may be, through inadvertence, some private papers in the archives which, I have no doubt, will be returned to me, as I mean to place in the archives any documents that I find among my private papers which should be in the said archives'.

The matter of the archives, however, was to prove a source of contention and great loss to the diocese. Dr Thomas McHale apparently left the diocese soon afterwards and returned to the Irish College in Paris, where he died in 1892. He had had, in many ways, in those four years since 1877, an unenviable task in trying to serve two masters. Thomas McHale was born in 1822 in Lahardane, Co. Mayo, but as his uncle had moved to Tuam during his teenage years, he had attended St Jarlath's College and later studied for the priesthood in the Irish College in Rome. His appointment by his uncle as his Secretary and Vicar–General in 1877 raised much opposition in Irish clerical circles, particularly as he had already been nominated to Rome by the archbishop as his desired co-adjutor. In spite of his saying that the 'archives are at the disposal' of the new archbishop, few of the valuable McHale papers are any longer in Tuam, as the main corpus of his documents has disappeared. The understanding is that Thomas McHale regarded most of the papers as personal to the archbishop. Certainly, important papers of the deceased archbishop were given to McHale's major biographer, Monsignor Bernard O'Reilly, a New York priest, by Thomas McHale. The two-volume biography, incorporating much of McHale's correspondence was completed between 1888 and 1890 when O'Reilly had had a long stay in France, particularly in Paris.[64] Thomas McHale had formed a close friendship with Msgr O'Reilly in 1889 when the latter had spent five months in the French resort of St Germaine en Laye.[65]

Monsignor O'Reilly was a native of Islandeady, Co Mayo, born in 1819. His family moved to Quebec, Canada in 1832. He became a Jesuit and was for a time Professor at Fordham University, New York. A noted historian, he was a biographer of Pope Leo XIII. Though he was never incardinated in New York archdiocese, he lived his later years in New York as a chaplain at Mount St Vincent's. Shortly after his return to the USA in 1890, his enormous two-volume biography of McHale was published in New York and Cincinnati. It was so partial towards McHale that its emergence must have been a severe trial to the new Archbishop, Dr MacEvilly.

When the book appeared in 1890, only nine years after McHale's death, the 1,400-page biography proved to be somewhat explosive. A critical review in the *Irish Ecclesiastical Record,* (*IER*) of January 1891, signed by one JCC, gives an idea of how it was received in Irish church circles:

> Monsignor O'Reilly has detailed in these volumes many features of Church government of a purely esoteric character, which, however entertaining and instructive an exhaustive account of them may prove to canonists and theologians, yet should certainly not appear in a book intended for the general public. Possibly some extenuation for this may be found in the fact that it is characteristic of the American mind to place everything above board; but where the spiritual good of the faithful is exposed to serious danger by detailing *the whole truth* ordinary prudence should dictate that even the historian should be satisfied with telling only *the truth.*
>
> There is another feature of Dr. O'Reilly's work upon which we feel bound to animadvert even in stronger terms than those we have hitherto employed. To facilitate the author's labours, he 'had placed at his disposal the voluminous manuscript correspondence bequeathed by the late archbishop to his nephew, the Very Rev. Thomas McHale, D.D., of the Irish College, Paris'. Among the numerous letters contained in this collection there are many of an essentially private character, written by the Irish bishops to one another, or to the Prefect of the Propaganda, at times when important ecclesiastical questions were under discussion, and when the opinions of individual prelates were solicited in circumstances demanding the utmost secrecy, and considerations of the highest moment demanded a conscientious expression of their convictions without hesitation or reserve.
>
> Now, we make bold to assert, without fear of contradiction, that the illustrious archbishop himself should never have felt justified during life in giving these documents to the public; and, therefore, we hold it a breach of the most sacred

> confidence to publish them after his death. It is an injustice, as well to the distinguished prelate himself as to those who trusted in his honour. And this injustice is aggravated by giving them to the world, at a time when ecclesiastical authority cannot deport itself with too much dignity, nor surround itself with too much prestige derived from its successes in the past. Of course it is possible that, in this matter, Dr O'Reilly was not absolutely his own master; but until he dissociates himself from the responsibility, at his door it must lie. If such licence were tolerated in the general public, as the author of these volumes boldly arrogates to himself, the most sacred relations of society should soon be rent asunder, and mutual confidence and friendship could no longer exist among men.
>
> If the serious blemishes to which we have called attention had been avoided, these would certainly be for Irishmen the two most profoundly interesting volumes that the present century has produced.

Indeed, just like the reviewer, Dr MacEvilly was also pained by the book and in particular the inclusion of a document of 1879 of complaint to *Propaganda Fide* in Rome by McHale complaining of an alleged affront to McHale by Dr MacEvilly in arranging a clergy Retreat in Galway. It was timed, McHale believed, to prevent both MacEvilly himself and the Galway priests from attending McHale's episcopal golden jubilee.

Archbishop MacEvilly went to the trouble of contributing to the next issue of the same journal. He said that among 'the several slanders published in the biography' there was one 'very damaging to His Grace's successor in the See of Tuam'. That slander had been maliciously published in some hostile journals at the time but its inclusion in a published work was a grievous injustice. MacEvilly enclosed a disavowal by the Retreat Conductor of that particular Retreat, the Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin, Most Rev James Lynch. The bishop stated that the retreat had been arranged six months before the celebration of the jubilee and neither of the two bishops involved had any idea when the jubilee was to be celebrated. He added 'had your Grace allowed me, as I offered at the time, to contradict this gross calumny, you might have been spared the pain of finding it repeated in Dr O'Reilly's *Life and Times of Dr McHale*.'[66]

This however, did not end the dispute. The redoubtable Thomas McHale, writing from Paris in the following issue of *IER*, p 369, claimed that the date of the great Jubilee had been well announced in the public press by the deceased archbishop as early as 2 January 1875 and he re-asserted that 'your impartial readers will, I

think, be forced to the conclusion that such a coincidence was not the result of chance and that those who fixed the date of the Retreat studiously ignored the approaching solemnity'.[67] He also criticised the published review, and the two bishop-correspondents, for hiding the fact that the complaint by John McHale was in a communication to Rome and, as such, was a matter between John McHale and his superiors. 'Had the two correspondents' he wrote, ' been aware of that fact, one at least of them, if not both, would have hesitated to qualify an archbishop's pronouncement and would have abstained from using the language which appears over his signature'.

The correspondence was a symptom of the rather fractious atmosphere in the diocese even ten years after McHale's death. Unfortunately, after such an interregnum, splits were created in the diocese. MacEvilly became known, inevitably, as a bishop who dealt harshly with certain clergy in the diocese. Several priests whom, he believed, had been over-tolerated by Archbishop McHale came under his scrutiny. A number of priests, including one grand-nephew of John McHale, resigned from the diocese and moved to the American mission. Dean D'Alton, in his *History of the Archdiocese of Tuam,* lists eight priests who left the diocese to work elsewhere. He says that priests who differed from the new archbishop or who showed any attraction for political engagement were rapidly transferred to places that would have been considered undesirable. One particular controversy in Castlebar concerning the location and the building of the present parish church and the abandonment of the half-built church on the other side of Chapel Street, begun during McHale's tenure by a relative of Dr McHale, Canon Magee, and therefore dubbed the 'McHale church', was a prime example of the bad spirit which prevailed for many a year.[68]

It was to take a generation to recover from the sad effects of the unfortunate division at the helm of the archdiocese. The experience might be sufficient to show that if ever there was system of replacing a bishop by a successor, the methods adopted in Tuam in the years 1875 to 1881 proved to be the least appropriate that could be used by the authorities of 'Mother Church'.

A New Administration

One of the first letters of Dr MacEvilly extant, concerning administration in Tuam diocese was his granting of permission to found a convent in Knock to one who proved to be a very controversial figure later, Mother Mary Clare, better known as 'the Nun of Kenmare'. The letter is dated 23 November 1881, just two

weeks after his accession as archbishop. In the letter MacEvilly is, of course, careful to say that the permission, 'is by no means to be inferred that we sanction or approve of the alleged apparition or miracles said to have occurred at Knock. As at present disposed, we neither approve nor disapprove of such[69].

It must be said that Dr MacEvilly was to prove to be an industrious and conscientious archbishop and ten new churches were built during his tenure. From an early date after his accession Archbishop MacEvilly had begun what he considered were necessary reforms throughout the archdiocese. He reversed the policy of his predecessor, who had defiantly opposed the National School education system. As a matter of first importance, a school-building programme under the National School System got underway. According to the Commissioners for National Education, sixty-eight national schools in the diocese, either new or existing, were vested under the board for the year 1884 alone and, under his jurisdiction, the number of primary schools in the diocese had doubled within ten years of his succession to Tuam.[70]

With his accession, the archdiocese of Tuam again came into the mainstream of the Irish Church and its bishops. MacEvilly carried on a regular correspondence with the new Archbishop of Dublin, Dr William Walsh, on many matters of public and church interest.

The Land Question

MacEvilly had a horror of outrages resulting from land agitation. Early in 1882, writing to Kirby, he welcomed the limited success of new Land Commission courts to improve the land situation but he felt that the courts were too slow. Therefore the bishops had to be very cautious in speaking because the people were suspicious. 'In this diocese', he ended enigmatically, 'I am reaping what I have not sown.'[71] Whatever his private feelings about such events, and whatever were his vacillating opinions of personages, his instinct was to exercise caution about public statements, always seeking the good of the church and religion.

Despite his suspicion and hostility to agrarianism, public disorder and Fenianism, Mac Evilly, however, was to learn at first hand, through the Maamtrasna affair, the heartlessness and chicanery of an alien government towards its Irish subjects. Dr MacEvilly had already condemned those notorious murders at Maamtrasna of 1882 when five members of the poverty-stricken Joyce family on the shore of Lough Mask were brutally slaughtered. He spoke in the following terms: 'it is sad

to think that scenes which lake, stream and towering hills have endowed with so many features of natural beauty should … be changed into a kind of western Golgotha, literally reddened with blood'.[72] However, in the aftermath, he had reason to condemn the Government for their treatment of their Irish subjects.

The archbishop himself was a witness, during a Confirmation ceremony at Tourmakeady church in August 1884, of a dramatic and notorious public confession of one of the state-protected 'Approvers' of having given false evidence at the Maamtrasna trials, which resulted in the execution of an innocent man, Myles Joyce. MacEvilly felt so deeply about the injustice that he undertook a campaign with the Government to right serious wrong. Writing in measured terms to the Lord Lieutenant, Lord Spencer, he showed the depth of his feeling:

13 August 1884.

To His Excellency, Earl Spencer,
Lord Lieutenant of Ireland.

May it please your Excellency,

Having fully and maturely considered the statement publicly made to me on the occasion of my visitation in the parish of Partry on Thursday 7th inst relative to the horrid occurrence that took place at Maamtrasna, I feel it my duty, in the interests of justice and Civil Society even for promoting due respect for and confidence in the administration of the law, to lay the whole case before Your Excellency as it came before me.

On the occasion referred to, a man named Thomas Casey came forward on his own accord and publicly stated that he had been induced under pain of capital punishment to swear away the life of Myles Joyce who had been executed in Galway. He declared that Myles Joyce was perfectly innocent, that he (Casey) offered to give information against the guilty parties and was told by the official that unless that he swore against Myles Joyce, though innocent, he himself would surely be hanged, that he got twenty minutes for deliberation and then, from terror of death, swore as had been suggested to him.

Being asked why he confessed now and not before, he declared that he was waiting the Visitation in his parish when he hoped to receive forgiveness and be restored by the

Archbishop to the Church. After having made a public Confession of his guilt and as an evidence of his sincerity, he declared he was ready in the interests of justice to suffer any pain, even death itself if necessary, on account of having been instrumental in taking away the life of an innocent man. Furthermore, he declared that he was also induced to swear falsely against four men now suffering penal servitude. Taking all the circumstances into account, my own conviction is that this later statement of the wretched man is truthful and sincere and, I may add, that since then has been fully corroborated by another man named Philbin, one of the leading Approvers in the case, and who is, I am informed, prepared to make similar public declaration.

In conclusion, I would ask Your Excellency, in order to allay public feeling so much excited in this neighbourhood, to direct a sworn inquiry into the case.

I have the honour to remain,
Your Excellency's faithful servant,

+ John MacEvilly,

Archbishop of Tuam.

The cry of the archbishop for redress and the subsequent outcry of so many others in Ireland was coldly resisted by an alien administration, though the controversy became the subject of several debates in the House of Commons. It was an instructive example to MacEvilly of the frustrations that touched so many people and priests. His experience of this had a mellowing effect on the mind of the archbishop whose natural inclination was to denounce outrage and what he called 'irreligion' at every opportunity and to emphasise always the necessity of good administration and law and order.

A Gap in the Archives

Very little of what should have been a voluminous correspondence between MacEvilly and his priests and fellow-bishops has survived in the diocesan archives. Apparently some misfortune happened to the corpus of the MacEvilly papers after his death, about 1905, when the archbishop's place of residence was transferred to its present location some two hundred metres away. Letters from MacEvilly are more likely to be found therefore in the archives of other dioceses or in Rome itself. These are a much-used source in Emmet Larkin's *The Roman Catholic Church and the Plan of Campaign, 1886-1888,* published in 1978.

MacEvilly's private letters give an insight into the character of John MacEvilly and the matters that concerned him. For instance, the Roman denunciation, following a certain amount of British intrigue, of the moral status of the 'Plan of Campaign' in the 1880's led him to protest, via Monsignor Kirby in Rome, in July 1888, as follows:

> The feeling of irritation though suppressed, is deep and, I fear, lasting. The cruel evictions are extending and maddening the people and clergy. For the first time we had cruel evictions in the diocese of Tuam within the last fortnight, and this in the very parish of Tuam. The evictors, pious Catholics, if you please, people who would dictate to the Holy Father himself and who boast that the priests are now silenced and dare not speak. I publicly denounced the cruel use made of the just act of the H. Father, which was never meant, but the contrary, to be made use of to harass and persecute the poor people who were rack-rented, disposed to pay a fair rent, but were thrown on the roadside, their houses levelled for not paying impossible rents. There was no resistance, the clergy prevailed on the people not to resist. But the vengeance is deep down in their hearts. The government is doing nothing to check these evictions but on the contrary, helping them.
>
> If the National League which, within due bounds and guided by prudent priests, is a perfectly legal association, were suppressed tomorrow, no power on earth could help the vast bulk of our people from forming and joining in *horrible secret societies,* subversive of altar and throne. While the people are permitted to join openly in legal societies in which to give vent to their feelings, all is right, order observed, but prevent that and drive them *underground,* secret societies would *honeycomb* every parish in the kingdom. I fear clergymen of the cast you speak of, who through indolence or indifference to the peoples wants, and through a hypocritical affectation of loyal sentiments, keep aloof from managing legal associations, and allow them to be in the hands of mercenary would-be local patriots, are doing much mischief in estranging our people from religion. Allow them to go away once, there is no bringing them back. .... The ferment is very great and I pray God may calm it.

The ferment was felt, not just on the part of the people, but by many of the bishops themselves. They felt that the true situation in Ireland had not been represented to the Roman authorities and that an inappropriate response had thus been secured. As a result, the perception could grow that the National League, an organisation which succeeded the Land League, had equivalently been condemned by the Church. The correspondence demonstrates that MacEvilly was not a man without feeling for the suffering of his people.

MacEvilly had, all his life, a deep suspicion of Parnell. Nevertheless, writing to Kirby on 8 May 1883, he acknowledged, that 'right or wrong, the people are convinced that Parnell rescued them from slavery. But there are many things I cannot forgive Parnell for, many things in which I suspect him'. Later, on 4 Nov 1885, he wrote 'the Irish Party is quite constitutional. I will give them any help I can. I was afraid of them but now regard them as the great safeguard against revolution.' This opinion, of course, was reversed again after Parnell's fall from grace in late 1890. Writing privately to Kirby in February 1891, he described him as an 'unmitigated villain'. 'Thank God', he said 'he was detected before he became head of an Irish government. He would certainly have persecuted the Church.'

A Hard Taskmaster?

MacEvilly's reputation for his severity as a strict taskmaster had followed him from his days in Galway.[73] Dean D'Alton in his *History of the Archdiocese of Tuam* does not mince his words in this regard, especially in regard to the archbishop's harshness to younger priests. 'Even old priests were often treated with great asperity, their failings and defects shown up, their past services to the Church and to the archbishop entirely forgotten'. His temper, Msgr D'Alton said 'had never been sweet, and had not been sweetened by advancing years'. He even added this opinion of the priests of the diocese, commenting on his amazing longevity, 'it was not, they avowed, that they wished the archbishop's death, but they were anxious to see the Archbishop promoted to Heaven'![74]

However, another priest, a Fr John McDermott, the administrator of the Cathedral, who got to know the archbishop well when he served under him in Tuam had this to say about him:

> Amongst us here in Tuam he did not put on a show for grandeur; he didn't exalt himself. No, he was as humble as the smallest. His heart was tender and if, sometime, he had to reprove and check and to say words and perhaps hurt, in the next moment he was as tender as a mother, ready to bind up the wound that he had inflicted. He was ready to heal again by a word, by a glance. To us the archbishop was all that. No one came into more immediate contact with him and no one knew his good qualities better than his priests and I say, with the full responsibility of my words, that to his priests the archbishop was not a bishop. He was a tender loving father, who was always ready to make allowances for the shortcomings of his priests'.[75]

An indication of his rather heavy-handed approach to priests may be gleaned from a file of correspondence with an old Nationalist Parish Priest, Fr William Joyce of Louisburgh. Fr Joyce had been described by Michael Davitt, in his book *The Fall of Feudalism,* as the 'first priest to join the Land League'. Fr Joyce had sent 'a formidable battalion of his parishioners to the much-feared Land League meeting in Westport on 8 June 1879 with a spirited letter advising the people to form an organisation for the total abolition of landlordism'[76].

MacEvilly, of course, had a special interest in his own native parish of Louisburgh and he had a special conduit of information from his family on every bit of news concerning the parish and its parish priest. His relationship with Fr Joyce then grew ever more fractious. His letters to Fr Joyce from 1880 to his death show him as a forceful, rather unbending autocrat. In October 1890 for instance the Parish Priest was given an ultimatum by MacEvilly to make a public apology to the archbishop after Sunday Mass for some remarks he had made about MacEvilly's appointing a second curate to Louisburgh, thereby reducing the priests' revenue. The tone of the apology, written by the archbishop himself, was demeaning of Fr Joyce. It was to be delivered, the archbishop's letter said, with 'neither a word to be added or taken away and no comments or prefatory observations whatever.'[77] The crux, was relieved, however, by an ingenious church clerk who, having told the priest not to worry proceeded to shepherd all the children noisily from the church gallery, the instant the apology was begun. The resulting mayhem meant that nobody in the church could hear the abject apology of the priest!

Even more harsh was the archbishop's peremptory dismissal of Fr Joyce from his position as parish priest in his old age, on the pretext of Fr Joyce's alleged failing sight. Fr Joyce's appeal to Rome, written pointedly in his own hand, certainly indicated adequate vision on his part. Fr Joyce's tone in his appeal and his introduction of extraneous matter, alleging nepotism on the part of the archbishop in his administration of the diocese, did not help his case. The appeal was rejected. Fr Joyce, however, outlived his archbishop and returned to full ministry for his last few years to the great delight of his people.

'The Killannin Schism'

Dr MacEvilly had also to contend with another formidable priest of the diocese, in the parish of Killannin, on the west of Lough Corrib, then in the archdiocese of Tuam. Certain diocesan boundaries in the Connemara region certainly did need

revision. With the bishop of Galway, Dr MacEvilly proposed to cede the parish of Killannin to Galway and make some adjustments in the parishes of Carraroe and Rosmuc. In a signed agreement of 24 May 1890, the bishops agreed that Carraroe, with adjacent islands, would go to Tuam diocese and Killannin would go to Galway diocese. However, the resident priest of Killannin, Fr Patrick Coyne, refused the offer either to become a priest of the Galway diocese or, alternatively, to move to another parish in Tuam. He had been appointed in 1874, but only as Administrator, as indeed had four of his immediate predecessors. As such, he would be removable under Canon Law, but Fr Coyne contended that he had in fact received formal 'collation of the parish' from Dr McHale and, as a Parish Priest, was irremovable except with his consent. Unfortunately for him he could not produce the document of collation.

He appealed to Rome against his archbishop but was over-ruled. He travelled to Rome to further the case but again with a similar result. The people of the parish supported Fr Coyne, another well-loved Land League campaigner. On several Sundays the Galway priest appointed in his place was resisted at the Chapel door. For more than two years the church was closed and the priest, Fr Mark Conroy, celebrated Mass in his own house. The 'Killannin Schism' was a much more notorious event than that of Louisburgh, because it involved a suspension, two High Court actions and the ultimate breaking down of Fr Coyne who was forced to retire to a house provided by his people and called the 'Land League House' where he lived until his death on 4 October 1899. Before he died, he sent for the parish priest of a neighbouring parish to whom he made known his anxiety to be reconciled with the Church and to die in peace with his ecclesiastical superiors. He asked two of his friends to tell the people he was sorry for any wrongs he had done. He was buried in his native Williamstown.[78] It was no comfort to Fr Coyne that the vital document appointing him as Parish Priest of Killannin turned up many years later, in a book belonging to Archbishop McHale.[79]

No Auxiliary

When John MacEvilly reached the age of eighty in 1898, he might well have requested the assistance of an auxiliary or a co-adjutor bishop. The historian, Dean D'Alton, says he would have been happy to have his friend and former co-diocesan, Bishop McCormack of Galway, as a Co-adjutor, but he was afraid that if he requested a helper, he might be given instead the Bishop of Clonfert, Dr Healy. In seeking to obtain a Co-adjutor of his own choice, he was, ironically, in the exact same position as his predecessor, Dr McHale had been twenty years before.

John MacEvilly was to outlast the nineteenth century and worked through three years of the new century. As he was a man still in robust health even in his eighties, he therefore lived out his regime without episcopal help, doing the Confirmations, saying public Mass and preaching up to three weeks before his death. Good health and vigour were so necessary to serve such an extensive diocese where regular Confirmation and Visitation circuits took a huge toll on one's energy. The practice was that Confirmation ceremonies were rostered on a deanery basis so that, in those days, when travel was by horse and carriage, and indeed by boat to the islands, the archbishop could be absent on Confirmation and Visitation for several weeks at a time. No wonder then that parish priests' houses of the day had to be over-large, as they had to accommodate the bishop and his entourage on those occasions.

John MacEvilly died on 26 November 1902. He was eighty-six years of age The huge crowd from all over the country who attended his funeral in November 1902 admired the wonderful up-grading in the decoration and fitting out of the Tuam Cathedral which he had co-ordinated. The *Tuam Herald* of 30 November 1902 recalls that the Cathedral had remained relatively unadorned since its completion in the 1830's. When MacEvilly came to Tuam, 'it was, interiorly, like a Presbyterian or a Methodist chapel in its old inadornment, its deadly draughtiness, and roofs and walls showing signs of neglect, the beautiful groinings on the roof falling, from the very damp. Now it is re-seated, floored with wood, warmed with hot water pipes, as comfortable a church as any in the country'.
Early in his life, Dr MacEvilly was Professor of Sacred Scripture in St Jarlath's College, which was then a seminary for generations of aspirants to the priesthood in the diocese. In his lifetime, Dr MacEvilly had published several commentaries on the Scriptures, and in the last year of his life, a collection of his sermons was also published. All his life he was blessed with a great energy and he had had a busy, if controversial life in the two dioceses of Galway and Tuam where he served as a bishop for a total of forty-six years. He was recognised as the essence of a true churchman and administrator, always seeking the good of the Church and the proclamation of the Gospel. The same issue of *The Tuam Herald* in November 1902 said that, as a result of Dr MacEvilly's accession in 1881, 'the Cimmerian gloom of ignorance which had enveloped the whole West is now well nigh removed and the up-springing generation at least know nothing of the terrible disadvantages which their less-favoured fathers had endured'.

One of Archbishop MacEvilly's particular themes in his preaching to the youth was the virtue of temperance. 'He was of that sterling stamp' the same obituary notice declares, that 'he could not preach what he did not practice. For over fifty years he had himself never touched a drop of alcohol. And his splendid constitution was evidence that this abstinence did him no harm. The good done by the archbishop in this respect would be impossible to estimate but it will live long after him as a cherished memory of his worth.'

Those who might look for the grave of Archbishop MacEvilly in Tuam will be disappointed. Where was he buried? Ironically, he was laid to rest exactly beside the grave of his predecessor and great opponent, Dr John McHale. As the poet James Shirley says:

> 'Their strong nerves at last must yield,
> They tame but one another still;
> Early or late
> They stoop to fate,
> And must give up their murmuring breath,
> When they, pale captives, creep to death.
> Only the actions of the just,
> Smell sweet and blossom in their dust'.

Four archbishops of Tuam, from Mc Hale to Gilmartin, were to be buried in that special crypt under the altar of the Cathedral. In 1968/69, however, in the laying out of the modern sanctuary, this crypt was filled in, so the graves of these indomitable pastors are no longer identifiable.

Sic transit gloria mundi!

PART THREE

The Archbishops of the Twentieth Century

ARCHBISHOP JOHN HEALY, 1903-18

The first archbishop appointed in the 20th century was Archbishop John Healy, formerly Bishop of Clonfert and a native of Ballinafad, Co Sligo. He had had a number of appointments in the diocese of Elphin before being appointed as Professor of Theology at Maynooth in 1879. As such, he was invited to write the Centenary History of Maynooth College, a huge tome of almost 800 pages, completed in only eight months in time for the centenary celebrations in 1895. By then he had become Coadjutor Bishop of Clonfert. Interestingly, in his appointment as Coadjutor to Dr Duggan of Clonfert in 1884, Dr Healy was only the third choice of the priests.[80] This, however, was not surprising as he was a priest of another diocese, Elphin. He had a long and difficult tenure in Clonfert as Co-adjutor to Bishop Duggan from 1884 – 1896. He had, previously, been appointed to the Senate of the Royal University by the Lord Lieutenant, in the expectation that he would indeed become a bishop. In a letter of the Catholic Duke of Norfolk to Lord Salisbury, the Prime Minister, Healy was described as 'a remarkable man and an hour's talk with him about Ireland would be of great use'. Because of this 'alliance' and indeed from other evidence, particularly his complaining to the Vatican about the nationalist Archbishop Walsh of Dublin in connection with Parnell's 'Plan of Campaign', he merited the reputation that he was, in truth, among those bishops known as 'Castle Bishops'.[81]

Archbishop Mac Evilly died, after a short illness, on 26 November 1902. After the Month's Mind Mass the parish priests gathered for the last ever publicly held election to nominate a new archbishop of Tuam. *The Tuam Herald* on 27 December 1902 reported, without the slightest effort at concealment that, in the ballot, Bishop Francis McCormack of Galway had obtained thirty-two votes, Bishop John Healy of Clonfert received nine and Dr O'Dea, Vice-President of Maynooth, received two. Two others received one vote each. The local paper predicted that 'after the bishops have considered the selection, they will forward the names to the Vatican for final decision but there can be hardly any doubt that Dr McCormack will be appointed'.

So the Tuam priests had opted for Dr McCormack, Bishop of Galway, as the new archbishop. He had been a former priest of the archdiocese and had previously been Bishop of Achonry and later of Galway. He was then, however, seventy years of age, having been born at Ballintubber, Co Mayo, on 8 April 1833. According to clerical lore, Pope Leo XIII, at the consistory, gave instructions that the name of McCormack should be struck out, as he was considered to be too old. He asked for the next in line. It was John Healy, former Professor in Maynooth and Bishop of Clonfert since 1896. He was appointed to Tuam on 13 February 1903.

Subsequently Healy stated that the appointment had come as some surprise to him and that he had been quite happy living in Clonfert diocese where, for most of his episcopate, he had lived in a large rented farm at 'Mount St Bernard', near Ballymacward. From that experience of rural living he developed a great interest and expertise in matters of agriculture and he made a notable contribution to the area of land reform, through the work of the Irish Agricultural Board of which he was a member.

Fr Patrick Joyce, one time Parish Priest of Cummer, wrote a biography of Archbishop Healy in 1931. According to this, Dr. Healy, when giving his first address in Tuam Cathedral at his installation on St Patrick's Day 1903, had no inhibitions about declaring openly that it was no thanks to the assembled priests of the diocese of Tuam that he found himself there. In the course of his address Dr Healy said, with pointed irony, 'we Catholic bishops, having the Apostolic succession and in union with the Pope, do not get our power from the people or from the clergy. We get our power from God in Heaven through our Holy Father the Pope'.[82]

Dr Healy had a special interest in early church history and, in 1905, he published *The Life and Writings of St Patrick.* His best-known work was *Ireland's Ancient Schools and Scholars* published in 1890. His interest in St Patrick caused him to re-establish the pilgrimage to Croagh Patrick and caused a church to be built on its summit. Since about 1890, funds were being collected for such a venture. In just one collection, ninety-eight priests of the diocese contributed a handsome sum of £239.

Archbishop Healy on Croagh Patrick 1905.

Healy was also supportive of the huge church-building programme then at full spate throughout the diocese. He had just moved from Clonfert where he had been responsible for much of the planning of St Brendan's Cathedral in Loughrea, soon to become famous as one of the great storehouses of religious art in all Ireland. Many of the craftsmen and artists used in Loughrea were to be subsequently used by him throughout the archdiocese, notably in Ballyhaunis church. No less than twelve new churches were to be built in his fifteen years tenure as archbishop, including Ballyhaunis, Claremorris, Glenamaddy and Newport.

He was also responsible for the building of the present archbishop's house in Tuam. The previous bishop's residence had been built by Archbishop Oliver Kelly one hundred years earlier Apparently, Dr Healy found the old bishops' residence on Bishop St, near the entrance gates to the Cathedral, rather too small and too public. In that house three archbishops had lived in what came to be called 'the Old Palace'. Subsequent to its use as home for the Catholic archbishops, the 'old palace' provided accommodation for pupils of the Presentation Convent school and later again for pupils of St Jarlath's College. Nowadays, it houses the diocesan archives. It hardly merited the title of 'palace' however, as it was a great deal more modest than the large residence of the bishops of the Church of Ireland on the other side of Bishop St, nowadays known as the 'Palace Restaurant'. However, in his new abode to the rear of the Cathedral, Dr Healy could henceforth look out on green fields, as he had done earlier in his life at 'Mount St Bernard', Ballymacward.

A Man of many Talents

Dr Healy was a sociable, outgoing individual. An interesting pen-picture of John Healy, penned by his former confrere in Maynooth, the noted and far-seeing liberal priest of his day, Fr Walter McDonald, appears in his book *Reminiscences of a Maynooth Professor.*[83] 'I certainly retain very tender recollections of his friendly intercourse that took place between us then.' The writer recounted a long mountain walk on one occasion through the Wicklow hills with Dr Healy and others. Dr Healy, he said 'was splendid on a mountain-top, which seemed to set his fancy free and ennoble him: he became a patriot and a poet. I spent some pleasant evenings with Dr Healy, who told stories from Irish history which he illuminated by snatches of the poetry of Mangan and of D'Arcy McGee. He was certainly a man of ability which however, was not over-refined or cultivated'. Referring to Healy's portrait, which still hangs in a Maynooth College cloister, he said it did not look like him, in that 'it refined away to drawing- room smoothness all the rough strength that gave the man his character'. Healy, he said 'was tall, blond, rough, strongly built, though inclined to waddle in his gait. He had imagination enough to be an orator and did speak well on occasions, though on anything like a prolonged flight, a pinion would give way and he would fall into the mud. As a Conservative, he was out of place. He should have been a mob orator, and he knew it!'

No wonder then that, all his life, Dr Healy relished company and became involved in many public societies. He was intimately concerned with the affairs

of the old Royal University and was also involved in the establishment of the new National University of Ireland in 1908, with its constituent colleges at Dublin, Cork and Galway and a 'Recognised College' in Maynooth. He was a Founder Member and first Vice-President of the Galway Archaeological and Historical Society, founded in March 1900, and was a regular contributor to its prestigious Journal. A perusal of his Presidential address of 1905 gives an insight into the wide range of his historical interests and insights.[84] His wide spectrum and expertise is even more obvious in the *Collected Papers and Addresses* of Dr Healy, published in his honour to mark his Episcopal Silver Jubilee in 1909 by the Catholic Truth Society of Ireland, of which he was first President.The papers and addresses range over matters theological, philosophical, biographical and archaeological.[85] His rhetorical skills, apparent in these addresses, and on major occasions in Irish Church history, give an idea why he was so frequently invited to be the main speaker on great Church occasions.

Another Side

However in the matter of diocesan administration, Dr Healy was less than successful. In later years, Fr Joseph Walsh, becoming Tuam Diocesan Secretary soon after the death of Archbishop Healy, had access to diocesan files and was in a special position to know of Dr Healy's shortcomings in this area. While acknowledging Dr Healy's great gifts as a preacher, as a writer, academic, and historian, he was to find that diocesan administration had suffered much under his stewardship. This view is indeed shared by Dean D'Alton, as intimated in his history of the archdiocese.[86]

Dr Healy had no inhibitions about declaring himself as a staunch Unionist, loyal to His Imperial Majesty. In May 1910, he sent a message of condolence in the customary fawning manner of the time to King George on the death of his father that 'the clergy of Tuam, in conference assembled, humbly tender to Your Majesty the expression of their regret at the death of your Royal father and also their deep sympathy with the Queen Mother and all the Royal family in their great sorrow'.[87]

Even more revealing is the remarkably frank statement of his leanings in an address of 1906, probably delivered extempore, at a bazaar to raise funds for his new residence.

> We in the west of Ireland here, have always been genuine loyalists, in spite of much

> foolish talk; but the Orangemen of Belfast are not genuine loyalists at all: they only prate about loyalty to the King but when their loyalty is tested it is a humbug. Our forefathers were loyal to King Charles I, perhaps more than he deserved - because he was King. They were loyal to King James II – unworthy though he was - because he was king. We are loyal to King Edward, their descendant, because he is king.We owe him our absolute and unconditional loyalty as king *de jure and de facto*. But what of them? They have no absolute loyalty, no genuine unconditional loyalty. We are loyal to the King because he is King, they are loyal to the King because he is a Protestant King… and if the King became a Catholic they would do what they threatened to do before – kick his crown into the Boyne!

His frankness was out of kilter with the rather staid formality of ecclesiastics of his time, at least in their public utterances. But John Healy, all his life, had been an outgoing type. He enjoyed the good life as part-time farmer and in his younger days was involved in such activities as angling, sailing, swimming and even coursing. And he especially enjoyed acting as a host, or a guest, at a dinner party.

In his analysis of Dr Healy's career, Fr Joseph Walsh, pointed to the failure of Dr Healy to know each of his priests and his inability or unwillingness to correct abuses among some of them. Dr Healy, in the course of an address on one occasion to the Tuam Diocesan Chapter, countered this criticism by claiming that he always tried to exercise the Christian virtue of compassion and leniency. 'I left Clonfert with great reluctance' because, he said, 'I had there a loyal and an obedient clergy who never gave me any trouble. I shall strive to govern you as I governed them, not in any spirit of harshness or domination, but with a love of a father and the sympathy of a friend'. Fr Joseph Walsh, however, also noted his 'hopeless method' of account-keeping and his long absences from Tuam while he stayed at his holiday home, 'The Priory', at Streamstown near Clifden. Most of all, he criticised his reliance on, and his delegation of powers to his cousin, Mr Frank Guy, a layman, who acted as his personal Secretary, as well as being a teacher in St Jarlath's College. He also believed that Mr Guy was allowed to write the Lenten Pastoral for 1915.[88] Joseph Walsh questioned the objectivity of Fr Joyce's biography which, he believed, bordered on hagiography.

The Maynooth Mission to China

Dr Healy made a notable contribution to the work of the Missions and the Irish Church the day he gave his permission to one of his brightest young priests, Fr John Blowick, then a Professor in Maynooth, to leave the diocese in order to set

Fr John Blowick

up the 'Maynooth Mission to China', later known as the Columban Missionaries. Cardinal Ó Fiaich, in his capacity as a historian, wrote to the present author on the occasion of the celebration of the Centenary of Fr Blowick's birth in 1988, 'the resignation of the young Fr Blowick from his Chair in Maynooth in 1916 was the event which above all others, under God, contributed most to the foundation of the Maynooth Mission to China'. At the time, however, Dr Healy had great difficulties about giving Fr Blowick permission to leave the diocese. Writing to him on 30 September 1916, Dr Healy said: 'do everything you can for the Chinese Mission. It is a Godlike work. Get as many as you can to do the work, but you yourself must stay at home'. The news shattered Fr Blowick but he made his way to Tuam and again begged permission. He recalled that, as they walked towards the kitchen he overheard the old archbishop saying to himself in his musings, 'this is the work of the Holy Ghost and I cannot stop it'.

Semi-Retirement

When, about 1911, Archbishop Healy's own health began to decline, he managed to dissuade Rome from appointing a co-adjutor bishop with rights of succession. His perception that one of the Connaught bishops could well have been appointed gave him the same concern as that felt by Archbishop McHale, thirty five years earlier. Quite naturally, he did not welcome the prospect of having an active bishop acting as a frustrated underling. His own experience as Coadjutor to Bishop Duggan in his younger days had not been easy. Therefore, on his own initiative, he instituted a process for the selection of his successor, despite his earlier public adherence to the propriety of leaving matters such as episcopal appointments to the absolute wisdom of the Holy See. Now, at this stage of his life, he had few qualms about ensuring that an auxiliary bishop, rather than a co-

adjutor archbishop with rights of succession, be appointed to assist him. He journeyed to Rome and confided, on his return in 1912, that Pope Pius X had granted him all his requests. He had managed to have Dr Michael Higgins, then Parish Priest of Cummer, appointed as Parish Priest of Castlebar and the new Auxiliary Bishop. This he arranged without the necessity of an election and the nomination of a *terna*. Dr Higgins, a native of Castlebar parish, had previously been President of St Jarlath's College.

Dean D'Alton, author of *History of the Archdiocese of Tuam (1928)*, would have known both of these men intimately. He records that, in Dr Healy's opinion, even if Dr Higgins were not subsequently appointed as archbishop and had to remain instead as Parish Priest of Castlebar, he could have no complaints, no matter who the future archbishop might be. It can easily be inferred, however, from the rather critical tone of Dean D'Alton's account of the appointment, that he himself was more than surprised when Dr Higgins was chosen. Perhaps, as Parish Priest of Ballinrobe since 1911, he might himself have been a possible candidate for the post.

Dr Healy was a pious individual and, especially in his old age, was much given to thoughts about his own mortality. His last years saw him rather helpless and suffering from increasing senility. He died on the eve of St Patrick's Day 1918, at the age of seventy-seven. The great events of 1916, the Great War, and the subsequent changes in the mood of the country left him untouched and in those two years, the Auxiliary Bishop Higgins acted as Apostolic Administrator, effectively, in charge of the archdiocese.

ARCHBISHOP THOMAS P GILMARTIN, 1918–1939

When the diocese became vacant in March 1918, due to the death of Dr Healy, the Auxiliary Bishop, Michael Higgins was not in good health. Dr Higgins was a native of Ballyheane, Castlebar. It was widely assumed that he would succeed as archbishop. He celebrated the funeral Mass of Archbishop Healy and, now Vicar Capitular, continued to be in charge of the diocese. But, just one month later, on 22 April, before the parish priests could meet formally to nominate candidates for the succession, Dr Higgins died suddenly in Castlebar.

For the interregnum, or the interval before a new appointment, Archdeacon Kilkenny of Claremorris was elected as Vicar Capitular, or administrator of the diocese by the members of the Diocesan Chapter. We have no information, however, on the results of any election or consultation process for the new archbishop. This is partly because the new Code of Canon Law had just been formulated, with new strictures on disclosing information about episcopal nominations.

Dean D'Alton, the Parish Priest of Ballinrobe, was present at the meeting to select the *terna.* It is understandable then, that in his *History of the Archdiocese of Tuam,* when referring to the new canonical obligations in regard to secrecy, he simply remarks that it was common knowledge that Thomas Gilmartin, the then Bishop of Clonfert, was held in high esteem by the priests of Tuam diocese. Later, however, in September 1918, at the dedication of the splendid new church at Newport, the Parish Priest Canon McDonald had no inhibitions about revealing openly that Dr Gilmartin was indeed not only the choice of the priests who had a

share in his selection, but was also the choice of those who had not. And that, he said 'was quickly appreciated by the Holy Father'.[89]

In his work in Clonfert diocese Dr Gilmartin had won great respect and favour. His appointment as the new archbishop was announced by Rome on 10 July 1918.

Thomas Gilmartin was born at Rhinsinna, Moneen, Castlebar, on 18 May 1861, son of Michael Gilmartin and Mary McHale. He was reared, however, by an aunt and uncle, Martin and Mary McHale on a ten-acre farm at Killeen, in the parish of Keelogues, Ballyvary. The practice of such fosterage was not uncommon in rural Ireland in these times, especially in the case of large families. He was of a family of two boys and five sisters, three of whom later became Sisters of Mercy.[90] He attended school in a little building beside the present Keelogues church[91] and perhaps spent some time also in Errew monastery school of the Franciscan Brothers, where his uncle, Br Sylvester Gilmartin, was a teacher. He later attended St Jarlath's College, Tuam, then a 'minor seminary' for admission to Maynooth. A notebook, or diary, kept by Gilmartin as a seminarian in Maynooth and as a young priest, dating from January 1883 to March 1886, remarkably survives in the Diocesan archives in Tuam. It is an extraordinary document, revealing him as an intense and deeply spiritual young man, as he reflected on the world, the passing seasons, his priesthood and his spiritual journey.

He was ordained a priest of the archdiocese in 1884. As a young priest, he had been on the staff of St Jarlath's College, where he taught Mathematics and Science for seven years. In 1891 he was selected as Dean of Discipline at Maynooth College with responsibility for the formation of future priests. In 1904 he became Vice-President of Maynooth and became Bishop of Clonfert in 1909. His time in Clonfert had shown his gifts as an able administrator and a wise pastoral leader of his people during the Great War of 1914-18.

While the three previous archbishops of Tuam had been National names and well-known writers in various fields, Thomas Gilmartin was a low-profile, pastoral archbishop. Straightaway he introduced a very ordered and thorough administrative style in governing his diocese. A certain number of disciplinary matters involving some priests had to be attended to immediately. Two parish priests, in fact, were dismissed after a canonical process.

Above: Painting of the Gilmartin cottage at Rinshinna, Castlebar, by William Ralph, courtesy of Mary Ralph.
Below: Relatives of Dr Gilmartin — from left:. Mrs M Moran, Katie Gilmartin, Tommie Moran, Mrs Catherine Gilmartin, Annie Gilmartin, Timothy A Gilmartin, Michael Gilmartin, (father of the archbishop, seated) and Patrick Flannery. at Rinshinna, March 1909. Picture courtesy of the Gilmartin-Keyes family, USA.

One particular dispute where Dr Gilmartin had to show great skills of humanity and adroitness was in his settlement of an appeal to Rome by the St Louis Sisters in Kiltimagh in 1919 against what they considered harsh treatment by their Bishop, Dr Morrisroe of Achonry. Dr Gilmartin was appointed to investigate the claim and in the process he, with his newly appointed secretary, Fr Joseph Walsh, interviewed singly every member of the communities in Balla and Kiltimagh convents. A huge correspondence followed and the dispute was settled to the great satisfaction of the St Louis sisters.[92] A happy outcome of the investigation was that, henceforth, all the St Louis convents in Ireland and England were amalgamated into one congregation under a Provincial leader in Monaghan, with great benefits to the sisters, especially in their later missionary endeavours.

Dr Gilmartin commenced a regime of regular meetings of the Diocesan Chapter, working through sub-committees, to assist him in reaching administrative decisions. Through the Vicars Forane in each of the deaneries of the diocese, and in accordance with the directions of the new Code of Canon Law, Canon 449, he immediately instituted the system of annual reports from these priests on the state of religion in their respective deaneries. Their reports vary from short and safe statements in some of the reports, to much fuller accounts from other deaneries.[93] The relevant canon had required that the reports should list matters of significance, good and bad, in the deanery during the previous year, any scandals that may have occurred and what remedies were taken, or were envisaged, to extirpate any abuses. Making such a report was a tall order for some simple Parish Priest who happened to have the additional title of Vicar Forane. Clearly those who submitted an unduly brief report had this fact brought to their attention and their reports for subsequent years were much longer, though but not necessarily more informative!

Some VF's, however, took the matter very seriously. They visited each parish in their deanery annually and commented appropriately and, in some detail, about parish buildings etc, in praise or blame of the work of their colleagues. Canon Macken of Dunmore was happy to report that the priests of the deanery 'lived in accordance with the sacred canons'. One case of reported 'dis-edification' had been investigated and the trouble was now 'happily at an end'. Archdeacon Fallon in Castlebar and Dean D'Alton in Ballinrobe had visited every parish in their respective deaneries, except two remote parishes. In each parish a simple reform like the mandatory purchase and use of hard-backed standard Registers for Births, Marriages, Deaths and Confirmation marked an enormous

improvement in pastoral practice. The injunction came about as a result of Canon 470, one of many clear directives that emerged in the new Code of Canon Law.

The practice of reports by Vicars Forane continued through the early 1920's, but seems to have waned as the years went on. Perhaps the invidiousness of making reports on one's colleagues was more than it was worth. However the exercise was an indication of the seriousness with which the new archbishop undertook his role as *epi-scopos* - the 'overseer' of the diocese. It indicated a considerable change from the rather laissez-faire regime in the latter years of his predecessor, Dr Healy. However, Dr Gilmartin always retained a reputation for gentleness, courtesy and deep Christian charity.

Gaelic Revival and the Mission to China

One of Archbishop Gilmartin's most pleasant tasks soon after coming to Tuam was his visit to the new Columban Missionaries' seminary at Dalgan, Shrule, to preach the sermon on the occasion of the sending out of the first batch of missionaries to China. It was 1920 and, appropriately 17 March, the Feast of St Patrick. He said the occasion was simple and still momentous and his address measured up well to the sense of endeavour, the sense of history and new horizons in the thinking of the Irish Church. 'Instead of obeying a call of human wisdom and friendship, they go to speak in a strange language to a strange people. They go to a land that has drunk the blood of martyrs. If they succeed, their glory will be great. If they fail, through no fault of their own, their merit and glory may be greater still'. [94]

It was a time of resurgence in the National spirit and Dr Gilmartin, all his life, had been strongly supportive of the aims and methods of *Connradh na Gaeilge*, the Gaelic League. As early as 1910, after his accession to Clonfert, he spoke of 'the close and delicate bonds that united Faith and the Irish language' and he said he would do all he could as a bishop in preserving and protecting these most precious treasures. Therefore he requested, though still under English rule, that teachers would promote the Irish language in every school. He also favoured Irish music and dance and tried to promote these through *Feiseanna* and his writings and lectures. Irish dances, or *Céilís,* were permitted and could be promoted by priests under proper conditions, but not for ecclesiastical purposes. He had, it seems, some distaste for 'foreign dances' and the new rave of jazz. Recognising the popularity of these dances, he instituted a policy of allowing priests to raise loans for the construction of Parochial Halls to discourage the emergence of commercial halls. A minute of a Chapter Meeting at the end of the episcopacy of

Dr Gilmartin stated that the local priest should formally object to the granting of a licence to a commercial hall where a parish already had a parochial hall. The court appearances by the local curates, however, had generally little effect on the independent-minded District Justices. Until the late1960's, however, the parochial halls, turned dance halls, became a major chore for the priests of the diocese. In their striving to provide some social service to their communities they often had to fall back on running commercial-style dances to keep the halls out of debt.

'The Troubles'

In his previous ministry as Bishop of Clonfert, Gilmartin had taken a relatively moderate line on the Rising of 1916. He had always had an abhorrence of violence and bloodshed. In an article for the *Father Matthew Record* in November 1915 in reference to the World War then raging, he said 'we stand aghast at the slaughter of man by man. It is horrible. The sight of human blood even in print is sickening'. Speaking in Loughrea Cathedral on the Sunday after the Rising in 1916 he said 'the Government, by its previous inaction, incurred a great responsibility....this thing was allowed to go too far. Sir Edward Carson and his Volunteers were permitted practically to do what they liked'. He made a strong appeal that bloodshed might be spared and he urged that the authorities and the military must above all, be guided by the principle of humanity.

As he began his ministry in Tuam in 1918, his tenure was to coincide with times of revolution and Civil War in Ireland, matters which concerned him deeply. His attitude to a just struggle and the national aims are clearly set out in a Preface he wrote in 1917 for a short biography of a predecessor, Dr Patrick Duggan, who was Bishop of Clonfert during the Land War. He wrote as follows:

> Some of the Government officials of the day blamed Dr Duggan for not denouncing more frequently the outrages connected with the land war. But how can a priest or bishop denounce crime without denouncing the real authors of the crime? Everybody now admits that Ireland has been grossly misruled. Misrule always leads to violations of public order. Is it the duty of bishops to denounce those violations and say nothing about the Government? The fundamental mistake of England's treatment of Ireland is that the English Government never sympathised with the genuine needs and aspirations of the Irish people. Every concession of improved government has been made to expediency rather than to justice. It took a great war to open the eyes of English statesmen to their mistake, and we must only now hope that it is not too late to make amends.

He had denounced the proposed conscription for the British Army in 1918 and made frequent pronouncements on the civil outrages that occurred in the years 1919-1923. In connection with general mayhem by soldiers and police throughout 1920, Dr Gilmartin had priests in Tuam town, the Neale, and other parishes submit reports to him of atrocities committed against the people. These reports included, in some cases, written statements from the victims concerned, so that he, as archbishop, could make the necessary protests. At the same time his addresses at the priests' Deanery Conferences give an idea of how much he feared the civil unrest was undermining religion.

In 1919 he began a series of correspondence, retained in the Diocesan archives, with General Sir Neville Macready, GOC at General Headquarters in Dublin. As a result of his protest, British troops were withdrawn from the Parochial Hall in Westport. The General acknowledged that Gilmartin had promised to do what he could to prevent a recurrence of trouble in the neighbourhood, which would again necessitate the presence of troops. 'It is, I feel entirely due to your good offices that the situation has been peaceful'.

The Sacking of Tuam

However, in July 1920, the archbishop had occasion to renew his protests. In regard to the archbishop's protest of 3 July 1920 about the behaviour of troops in Tuam, the General's rather lame reply was that he believed the occurrence 'may be one of those which is due to the natural inexperience of our young soldiers'. Two weeks later, however, Gilmartin had a more serious complaint to make.

20 July 1920.

Dear General Macready,

I regret to have to trouble you again and, that this time, the matter is very serious. Two policemen were shot dead yesterday evening about three miles from Tuam, on their way to Dunmore where they are stationed. This was a dastardly crime, which we deplore and condemn. It is the first of its kind in this district. I am satisfied that the good people of Tuam would reprobate this deed. But the sequel is calculated to seriously imperil the peace and good order of the town.

The sequel is that about 5 am this morning, in revenge for the deaths of their comrades, the police raided the town almost from end to end. They burned the beautiful Town

Hall to the ground. They set fire to a large shop, which is now completely demolished. They tried to set fire to at least four other shops. They ruthlessly broke plate glass windows. Shots were fired into several houses and a bomb was thrown into at least one house. I heard the bombing and firing from 5am to about 5.45 am.

I have interviewed the police authorities here who try to put the blame on police who came from Galway under the County Inspector. One man alleges it was the Main Head Constable kept him from being shot dead by the police.

You may imagine the state of terror and indignation that exists today in what was a peaceful and prosperous town, when the relations between the police and the people were as cordial as could be expected. I hope from you that a sworn inquiry is opened immediately with a view to bringing all culprits to justice.

+ T. P. Gilmartin

In his reply, General Macready said that such crimes as the murder of the two policemen 'could not take place without at least the tacit consent and connivance of a large section of the population'. He stated that, as no military were involved in the outrage, the matter did not come within his province. Four days later he

The burning of Tuam Town Hall, July 1920.

added that if proof were needed for his contention that his Grace was incorrect in stating that no large section of the people in Tuam had sympathy with crime, 'it was forthcoming in the fact that, among the citizens, it was impossible to obtain a coroner's jury to inquire into the assassination of the constables in the vicinity of the town'. The archbishop, however, replied that had General Macready seen Tuam as he himself had seen it on the previous Wednesday gutted with shot and fire, 'you would not, I think, conclude that failure to find a coroner's jury was evidence of indifference to crime. It was evidence of honest and just indignation with the perpetrators of multiple and wholly unjustifiable crime, although those who are paid to put down outrages have given us here a shocking example of outrages'. He assured the general that he would continue to use all the influence he possessed to promote peace and goodwill among all sections of the community'.[95]

The protest of Gilmartin, quoted above, which was published in *The Freeman's Journal*, merited much praise from many quarters. One letter from an Irish priest in Pennsylvania said that his forthright condemnation of the outrage 'was receiving the highest encomiums of praise from the secular and religious press of the United States'. Not so fulsome however was a letter from a very angry Eoin McNeill, the person who as Head of the Volunteers, had countermanded the Rising of 1916. By 1920 he was technically 'Minister for Finance' in the First Dáil. Writing from Omeath to the archbishop on 2 July 1920, he objected to the archbishop's condemnation of the killing of the two policemen as 'dastardly murder, an adjective so much appreciated by the British commander' as Macready had shown in his reply to Gilmartin, published also in *The Freeman*. The archbishop's condemnation did not go far enough. It was not a case for vagueness.

> 'Either we Irishmen are morally entitled to carry arms or we are not. If we are then, we are entitled to defend our right and if the so-called police, who are well known to Your Grace to be no police but a mere bunch of British military forces, endanger our lives in the exercise of that right, Your Grace can define the extent of resistance that is morally justifiable. For my part I have not the slightest doubt that I am entitled to bear arms for Ireland in defence of Ireland against the British forces and also I am entitled to resist being disarmed to the same degree as I may resist an attempt to destroy my house, or my life, or the lives of my family'.[96]

The ambush and assassination of the two policemen, Constables Carey and Burke, had taken place at Newtown Darcy, as they were returning to their base in

Dunmore. A barricade had been thrown across the road. It was a classic IRA ambush. Dr Gilmartin said in the Cathedral on the Sunday following the ambush that 'the murder was the first murder or attempted murder of a policeman within the precincts in the diocese'. Had no reprisals taken place, he felt that there would have been a great wave of sympathy with the police.[97] He said he had been preaching against such outrages for some time and indeed, at clergy conferences in Tuam in March and September 1920, the archbishop had exhorted the priests to set their face against any outbreak of violence or disturbance in their parishes. One minute of the September Conference records that 'the archbishop gave valuable and practical advice regarding the disturbed state of the country and directed priests to dissuade people from shooting at policemen or committing crime or outrage of any kind.' Archdeacon Kilkenny in Claremorris at one stage reported that 'to the wise guidance of the clergy especially, the relative calm in that area could be attributed'. Dr Gilmartin also denounced again in vivid terms the outrageous behaviour of the police on that fateful Tuesday evening. However he again cautioned people against any further reprisals, quoting the dictum 'Revenge is mine, says the Lord'. The burning and rioting by police resulted in a claim from fifty-five business people in the town for wanton destruction of their property. The claims amounted to over £72,000.

So the times were contentious and religious leaders had then to strive to show the appropriate level of moral courage and forthrightness. Such a burden of anxiety was to continue to be borne by their successors as bishops who worked in Northern Ireland in facing the troubles there until the end of the Millennium.

The 'Truce of God'

On the same July Sunday in the Cathedral he first proposed what he termed a 'Truce of God'. Later that year, in early November, in a letter to the English Catholic paper *The Universe,* he repeated this call and explained it more clearly. By then the situation had rapidly grown worse in the country. By November, five months after the 'sack of Tuam', no policemen had again been molested in the district. There had been relative peace, though no promise of compensation had been received for all the damage done. However in November a body of Black and Tans had arrived in Tuam, and for four weeks, they terrorised the people by midnight searches, indiscriminate shooting and the flogging of individuals. Speaking about the new wave of terrorism, the archbishop said that the people of Ireland genuinely wanted peace. There was need for a truce. What he had in mind was a six-month truce, beginning at Christmas 1920, which would have to be declared by the British Government. 'Let them propose a Truce, introduce and

pass a full measure of Home Rule including full fiscal control, and forthwith, in my opinion, serious strife will cease'.

November 1920 had been a horrible month for violence, including the assassination of nineteen British agents on the morning of 20 November and the ensuing reprisal at Croke Park on that same 'Bloody Sunday' when fourteen civilians were shot dead. The situation in the West also grew steadily worse. On 27 November a young man, Michael Moran from Carrowmoneen, Tuam, was shot dead allegedly, 'while trying to escape'. The archbishop himself presided at his funeral Mass and at his burial. He threw disdain on 'the cold, official verdict of a secret court' in regard to the circumstances of the death, as the young man had no reason to try to escape, for he had been charged with no crime.

In all these circumstances, Dr Gilmartin's dramatic National Appeal for a Truce of God was to catapult him into the limelight and his ideas stirred many people in Ireland and England. At that particular time the Home Rule Bill was going through Parliament. The result of his appeal was that he was in frequent demand for interviews from many Irish and British newspapers and he received a large volume of correspondence from notable people in favour of his ideas. A large file, incorporating all this correspondence, has recently come to light in the Tuam Diocesan archives.[98]

Dr Gilmartin appealed that the First Sunday of Advent would be an ideal opportunity to make a proclamation for peace. The British government would have to take the initiative. The murders of servants of the Crown, he believed, were the work of irresponsible men whose idea was to wake Britain out of indifference by violence. Curiously, perhaps naively, he believed that, as the Sinn Fein party denied responsibility for these murders, they could not be expected to call them off. He felt certain that if the servants of the Crown gave no provocation, they would be allowed to discharge their duties. The Irish, he believed, were the most law-abiding on earth and they would respond to generous treatment. All admitted, he said, that Ireland had been greatly misgoverned.

The hope would be that the Government would withdraw the military for the period of the truce and call on both sides to refrain from violence, and the civilians would undertake not to molest the servants of the Crown. This could be done by a solemn proclamation, by way of the expedient of the ancient 'Truce of God', which did so much, he said, in the eleventh and twelfth centuries to

mitigate the horrors of private wars. In the meantime, the Government would give an undertaking to have the relations between the two countries adjusted on a basis of justice, with reparation for the past and safeguards for the future. They would be allowed to discharge, unharmed, their ordinary duties. England, would, in the new atmosphere thus created, come to see that 'justice and generosity were surer than the path which was strewn with the wrecks of her failure in Ireland'.

The times were violent, however, and it is extremely unlikely that the IRA was ready to call off its campaign. The Lord Mayor of Cork, Tomás McCurtain, had been shot dead in March 1920 and his successor as Lord Mayor, Terence Mac Swiney, had died, while on hunger-strike in an English prison, on 24 October. Cork city had been extensively burned down by Government forces. The new Lord Mayor of Cork, Diarmaid Ó Ceallacháin, writing to Dr Gilmartin on 9 December on black-bordered notepaper of his office, stated that, as a Republican, he held that the question of a Truce or Peace was 'essentially and exclusively the province of the respective governments' – in Ireland, a question solely for Dáil Éireann. Clearly, neither side was ready for a Truce. The blood-lust was not yet sated.

Dr Gilmartin and Winston Churchill

Nevertheless the ideas of the Archbishop of Tuam on the possibility of a truce, many times repeated in newspaper interviews, did reach to the top of the British establishment. There are two personal letters addressed to Dr Gilmartin in the same file in the diocesan archives, signed by no less a personage than Winston S Churchill, then Secretary of State for War. Several more letters were received from an influential contact in London, Sir Shane Leslie, who was a first cousin of Churchill. On 24 Nov 1924 Leslie told Dr Gilmartin that he had just been to the Foreign Office and was told on the highest authority, if the Sinn Fein leaders, or the Hierarchy, could proclaim successfully one fortnight without an organised murder, that honourable negotiations would follow. Archbishop Mannix of Melbourne would be invited to London and would be given a personal assurance of this to give to the Irish Hierarchy.

In his first letter to Archbishop Gilmartin, Winston Churchill wrote as follows:

> The War Office
> Whitehall
> SW1.
>
> 14 December 1920.
>
> My dear Lord Archbishop of Tuam,
>
> I am obliged to you for your letter of the 9th instant. No one desires more than I do a cessation of the conditions of strife, which are ruining the happiness and the prosperity of the Irish people.
> It is my earnest hope that better days may come. It is in that sense I have acted throughout. But the murders of the police and military must stop. Until they stop there can be no recovery and things will go from bad to worse. As soon as they stop, the Irish people will be able to take up the constitutional discussion of their relations with Great Britain; and surely the fact that the present Home Rule Bill is passing into law not upon the authority of a single Party dependent on the Irish vote, but with the assent of the overwhelming majority of the Unionist Party, is a great fact to which none should blind themselves.
> Yours faithfully,
> Winston S. Churchill.

On the same day, 14 December 1920, the archbishop received one of many letters from a Fr Leonard McCabe of East Finchley, London, who had contacts in the Office of the Prime Minister, Lloyd George. Fr McCabe reported that he had shown the latest letter he had received from Gilmartin to Mr Ernest Evans, Confidential Secretary to the Prime Minister, who had passed it on to Lloyd George. It had, according to Fr McCabe, made a great impression on the Prime Minister and, if the application for a 'Truce of God' were signed by the rest of the Irish Hierarchy and the representatives of the Irish people, the Truce could be granted. In his formal reply to Fr McCabe, the Secretary, Ernest Evans had pointed to the report of Mr Lloyd George's statement in the House of Commons on the previous Friday in which he expressed the desire of the Government to facilitate the work of those who were anxious to strive for a settlement.

The exact reply of Archbishop Gilmartin to Winston Churchill is not extant in the Tuam archives but we can deduce its tenor from this further letter from Churchill, dated 27 December 1920.

Dear Archbishop of Tuam,

I need scarcely tell you how intensely I feel the desire and need for a truce and an appeasement in Ireland. The difficulty we encounter is that no body is in corporate and continuous existence which has the power or even the constitutional right to speak for Ireland. Mean-while the efforts and wishes of well-meaning individuals and, as I believe, the general desire of the Irish people are both paralysed by the terroristic action of a violent and desperate body of men and the inevitable consequences in quasi-war conditions which such action produces. The first necessity is therefore that the Irish people and their natural leaders should make their voices heard in language of far-reaching courage and of ultimate goodwill. This is a matter in which Irishmen must take the lead. Naturally the British Government, although quite able to cope with violence, would be bound to meet every such advance step by step. From this point of view you must not undervalue the present Home Rule Act now on the Statute Book with the assent of all parties and the full authority of the Crown. Action will follow on this measure.

You say, "It does not represent the just demands of the great majority of the Irish people". No one has ever said that it is the last word in the relations between the two islands. On the contrary, it is the first word. But spoken as it is, not under duress but from conviction, it is a great word; and your countrymen will be most unwise if they do not meditate profoundly upon it. Britain will never consent, while life and strength remain, to the destruction of the integrity of the British Empire. Was it not Grattan who said "The Channel forbids union; the ocean forbids separation."?

Yours faithfully,
Winston S. Churchill.

The reply of Churchill is notable for its frankness and its clear intent to engage with whatever the archbishop might be able to do. Indeed his two letters are important documents in the story of the Anglo-Irish War. His comment that 'nobody has ever said that the Home Rule Bill was the last word in the relations between the islands but on the contrary, it was the first word', was prophetic. It strangely pre-echoed the sentiments of Michael Collins two years later, when he said the Treaty was not the end of negotiations, but was a stepping-stone to peace. Meantime the views of Archbishop Gilmartin were receiving widespread support everywhere. A major Rally organised by the Catholic Women's Suffrage Society was to be held in Caxton Hall, Westminster on Saturday 18 December to call upon the Government to establish a 'Truce of God' in Ireland and they wrote to

the archbishop to ask for a message to be read at the rally. The Secretary wrote subsequently that the hall was packed to the doors and the audience was most enthusiastic in his support. Their resolution, passed unanimously, was forwarded to the Prime Minister and to the Chief Secretary, Sir Hamar Greenwood.

Speaking in Tuam Cathedral on 1 January 1921 Dr. Gilmartin said that, although the power to govern comes from God, the people have a right, for just reasons, to seek a change of government.[99]

> There are two ways for bringing about this change; one by revolution and the other by constitutional action.
>
> In the present circumstances of this country armed resistance to the existing Government is unlawful; firstly because there is no chance of success, and, secondly, the evils of such a course would be much greater than the evils it would try to remedy. Hence, I feel bound to warn the brave young men against rash action. Let them remember that rashness is the coward's crime, while self-restraint is the highest courage.
>
> I feel also bound to warn them against the danger of joining secret societies. Under the new Canon Law members of secret societies that plot against the Church or State are, *ipso facto,* excommunicated. I hope there are no such societies in this locality. When, instead of peace, we have war, and instead of order there is disorder and insecurity; instead of content there is grave discontent, there is something wrong with the spirit of government. It may be that there are faults on both sides, and if this morning both sides would listen to the message of the Child Saviour there would lie no difficulty in establishing a Truce of God that will lead to peace, order and contentment.

Referring to the invasion of the Aran Islands by a mixed force of military and police, who indulged in an orgy of terrorism, loot, and destruction, his Grace said: "I protest as archbishop, against this barbarous treatment of my people, and pray that God may protect them from any recurrence of such a terrible ordeal."

His Grace asked for prayers for all the victims of terror, without distinction, in the diocese, for the numerous sons of Ireland who had been taken away from their families and 'are spending a cheerless Christmas in the prison cell or the prison camp, without charge or trial; and, lastly, for a speedy peace; and in particular that God may deliver the diocese from murder, attempted murder, ambushes, arson, and terrorism'.

Sir Shane Leslie, writing on 24 January 1921, assured Dr Gilmartin that *The London Times* would feature anything he wished to be brought before the British public. *The Times* had just published a letter addressed by Gilmartin to the Parish Priest of Headford in sympathy to his people after an appalling atrocity. The letter said:

> 'It must have wrung your heart as it did mine, to see eleven homesteads burned out and nine families left destitute and homeless. One crime does not justify another and while I condemn the criminal and cowardly folly of the ambushers, I also condemn the inhuman barbarity of such reprisals as you were obliged to witness. I have done all I possibly could to hold up the law of God before the eyes of the Government as well as before the eyes of the people. I have condemned crime and counter-crime; I have preached the gospel of peace and forgiveness, and I now appeal again to the best elements of the two sister nations to call off a state of warfare, which is a negation of Christianity and which, if continued, may bring disaster to the stronger as well as the weaker nation. In the name of Christianity, I renew our call for a 'truce of God'.

In his Lenten Pastoral for 1921, Dr. Gilmartin made it clear that he had the fullest sympathy with the claims of the country to political independence, but he declared that if the constitutional process of asserting their claims was slow, it was mild and safer than revolutionary methods, and that those who favoured such methods had certainly got no mandate for their course of action from the Irish people. There were at present, in parts of the country, people going through an agony of anarchy, terrorism, and reprisals. He continued:

> Outrages by servants of the Crown in this diocese constitute a terrible indictment. Some eight civilians have been shot dead without previous trial, others have been fired at and wounded. Several houses have been burned, including a presbytery with its sacred books and vessels. Not a few persons have been recently flogged and humiliated, and many are lodged in prison without charge or trial. Against this unchristian and inhuman treatment we have made our protests. The provocation to violence has become almost unbearable, but so far, thank God, you have come well through the ordeal.

His forthright denunciation of terrorism was warmly applauded by Archdeacon Fallon, PP Castlebar who wrote to him as follows: 'You struck the true note when you said the IRA have no authority from the Irish people or from any moral principle to wage ambush war with unequal forces and with consequences of

arson and death to innocent people. You have courageously given the people moral guidance and 'damn the consequences'.[100]

Despite his very best efforts, however, the 'Truce of God' was not to be established at that time but it may have paved the way for such an event. While 1919 had seen the murder of thirteen policemen, the first six months of 1920 saw over 200 policemen murdered and no less than 707 civilians. Eventually, in the following July of 1921, the inevitable Truce was declared.

It was a trying time in Ireland for all participants and their families but those in positions of leadership suffered great anxiety too.

The Civil War

His own agony of spirit, and much suffering among the people, was to continue during the subsequent Civil War. The present writer remembers that his old teacher, who was involved in that struggle, called it 'the greatest stain on our race'. Railways and road-bridges were blown up. Gun-battles and fatalities were again commonplace. Neighbours fought on opposite sides and the newly founded Irish Free State was everyday at risk. It was a political question but also a moral one and Archbishop Gilmartin agonised over his responsibility to call for peace and justice and the rule of law. He realised there were committed and conscientious people on both sides. But the Church was not afraid then of denunciations, where necessary, and Dr Gilmartin did not shrink from what he regarded as his duty in calling for the laying down of arms and a cessation of all violence.

Speaking in the Cathedral on 4 December 1922 he referred to 'a grave violation of justice in Tuam on the previous Thursday evening when the people of the town were terrorised and shops looted under cover of fire-arms'.

> I am not going to speak any bitter words here tonight. But those who are giving so much trouble, as we had here the other night, are good Catholic boys who have been misguided. It is our Mission to bring them back to Truth and Peace. The papers say that that here on last Thursday night a man came into this Cathedral with a drawn revolver. I have no evidence that this was the case. I invite him to come here again on Christmas night and make an offering of the revolver to the Infant Jesus'. [101]

Again a few weeks later he called for surrender of the insurgents, 'not to men, but to God' and he made the appeal he said in the names of such bishops of the past as Oliver Plunkett and his great predecessor, John McHale.

Unfortunately his words were not heard in the diocese. A major engagement with troops of the National Army at Cluid, Annaghdown, in February resulted in the arrest of eight men, mostly from the Annaghdown and Caherlistrane parishes, armed with weapons - then an offence carrying the death penalty. The Civil War may have been coming to a close with the capture and deaths of so many of the insurgent leaders but six of these men arrested were transported from Renmore Barracks to Tuam Workhouse in April 1923, where they were executed, in two batches of three, on the following morning of Wednesday 11 April. They were: Séamus O'Malley, Frank Cunnane, Michael Monaghan, Sean Newell, Seán Maguire and Martin Moylan. They met their deaths bravely. They had been attended during the night by two of the Tuam priests and attended Mass at which two of them served.[102] The fact that the prisoners had been moved to Tuam from Galway for the executions and that they took place just two weeks before the end of the Civil War was doubly depressing. The archbishop had been constantly protesting about reprisals during these years and some people believed these executions were pointedly carried out within earshot of his episcopal residence, although he happened to be in Maynooth on the morning of the executions.[103] However, it is believed that the prisoners were transferred to Tuam for execution because of the insensitivity of having executions in Galway in the days of the funeral of its then bishop, Thomas O'Dea, who had died on 9 April 1923.

In a reply of 22 April, to a resolution which the Tuam Town Commissioners had sent him, Dr Gilmartin wrote: 'I have already expressed my sympathy with the people of Tuam in the horror we all felt at the Tuam executions, and the deaths which preceded them. As in the past, I hope to use whatever influence I possess to put an end to all violence and counter-violence. As there is a constitutional way of composing our domestic discords, existing conditions are, as you say, a disgrace. I join with you in praying that Msgr Luzio's mission to Ireland (on behalf of the Holy Father) may be crowned with success.'

Eight days later the final order to cease activities and dump arms was announced by the Chief of Staff of the IRA, Frank Aiken.

The Cathedral

Dr Gilmartin's other duties as archbishop were fulfilled to the letter. He had a great part in the furthering of the programme of church building and renovation. This was reflected in his attention to the refurbishing of the Cathedral and an extension of St Jarlath's College. Over twenty churches were to be built or refurbished during his episcopate and twelve new convents were opened throughout the diocese.

In July 1925 the archbishop and a local committee appealed for funds to carry out repairs and redecoration of the Cathedral in preparation for the celebration of the centenary of its consecration. However, this appeal had to be very much widened when, in the late 1920's, he had to face the unwelcome news that the Cathedral roof was unsafe as its roofing timbers were infested by the death-watch beetle. There was no alternative but a complete new roof and this had to be faced at a cost of £20,000 - an enormous sum in those days. He put down his own name for £1,000, which he said, 'I hope to pay in instalments, if I live'.[104] The committee worked wonderfully and, by January 1930, £21,345 had been raised. Many Irish bishops and all the priests of the diocese made substantial contributions. A special collection was held in all the parishes of the diocese and the list of contributors has been retained in the diocesan archives.[105] The work involved placing a temporary roof across the pillars, which Dr Gilmartin said, would be rainproof. He promised that though the beautiful ceiling would have to be removed, it would be 'faithfully reproduced in every line.' The work would take at least a year.

Spiritual Leader

At the time, Confraternities and Sodalities were very much part of pastoral practice and he was to the fore in promoting such areas of devotion. The practice of frequent Communion re-introduced by Pope Pius X in the early party of the century, had to be developed with great effort in Ireland where certain vestiges of Jansenism had crept in. Jansenism emphasised the unworthiness of the sinner. The Sodality of the Sacred Heart, which enjoined on members monthly Confession and Communion, was also strongly promoted in the diocese. The practice of regular Confession was further encouraged by the practice of the 'wind-up Station', which was celebrated in the churches at the end of the village Stations in November and Lent and priests from all over the deanery came along as extra Confessors.

Dr Gilmartin showed his great humanity and led national relief funds at the time of the dreadful sea-disaster at Cleggan in 1927, when twenty-five fishermen lost their lives, and when, in 1938, a fire in a workers' bothy in Kirkintolloch, Scotland, caused the deaths of ten migrant labourers from Achill.

A Clergy Conference in March 1920 outlined the regulations with regard to Masses in private houses. These were allowed in the following circumstances: village Stations, corpse-houses, new homes, great sickness or affliction, and on the occasion of the Enthronement of the Sacred Heart emblem in the home. In particular, the inclusion of the corpse-house situation is of interest as it was a recognition of a practice surviving since Penal Days whereby the corpse was brought directly from the person's home to the cemetery. This practice, in fact, continued in some areas almost into the 1940's.

The Clergy Conference Minutes during the years of Archbishop Gilmartin's regime display a wide range of concerns about undesirable practices: priests playing cards late at night, the rise of commercial dance-halls for profit and young girls emigrating to take up posts in England where their Catholic faith might be endangered.

Archbishop Gilmartin with the Papal Nuncio, Archbishop Paschal Robinson (centre), at Croagh Patrick, 1930.

Strict procedures, which would create horror to modern sensibilities in regard to births outside wedlock, were discussed at these gatherings. It was a time, however, when preaching in church took a strong moralistic tone. Denunciations, with vigour and fearlessness, of any abuse whether it was perjury or theft, violence or irreligion, were openly and vigorously made. Sexual sins in particular were not spared. What was then described by all society as an 'illegitimate birth' was a matter of special concern and did not escape public denunciation. A Minute of a 1934 Conference puts the matter in perspective.

> Whenever an illegitimate birth occurs in a parish, and is publicly known, the scandal ought to be denounced without mentioning names, with a view to calling the guilty to repentance and as a deterrent to others. The denunciation ought to be in sorrow more than in anger and the preacher ought to point to the scandal as:
> a grave sin against the sacrament of matrimony and against the sixth commandment,
> a degradation of the soul,
> as a disgrace to the family,
> as a sin against the good name of the locality
> Not only is the general permission given, but a direction is also given, to make this denunciation. In a special case, after consultation with His Grace the Archbishop, the matter may be deferred for a time. But in every case the scandal is to be immediately referred to the archbishop.

This practice and the reading of the 'letter' on such a matter from the archbishop, names never being mentioned, remained in common use until the 1950's and, of course, was a cause of great pain, not just to the two persons directly concerned but to the wider families of both parties. The aim to underline the sacredness of marriage was a worthy one but the strategy adopted would seem to be misguided in its lack of Christian compassion. Such admonitions were, of course, the accepted practice throughout Ireland and elsewhere, and not confined to the Catholic Church. Sometimes it has been considered as directed exclusively at women, but the formal letters of sorrow or denunciation, always addressed to the parish Priest, came down very hard on men also, especially when exploitation of a younger girl was involved.[106]

The Mayo Librarianship Dispute

An unwelcome dispute arose in Co Mayo in late 1930, where the County Council, in a sort of stand-off against the recently introduced Local Appointments

Commission, refused to ratify the nomination of a young Trinity College graduate, Miss Letitia Dunbar-Harrison, for appointment as County Librarian for Mayo.

The debate in the Library Committee of Mayo County Council was reported verbatim in *The Connaught Telegraph* of 6 December 1931. The heading of the report was, itself, telling:

'THE LIBRARIANSHIP: TRINITY STUDENT RECOMMENDED:
Recommendation Rejected: Some Hard Hitting'.

The Library service in Mayo was relatively new and there had been great involvement by the clergy in their parishes in making branch libraries possible. The clergy, therefore, were strongly represented on the committee by five priests and a religious brother. There was also one Protestant clergyman, a doctor, and three members of the County Council itself. Three Tuam diocesan priests, Dean D'Alton, Archdeacon Fallon and Fr Geoffrey Prendergast had acted on the Library Committee for several years and indeed also on the new Vocational Educational Committee. The Chairman of the Library Committee was the Bishop of Killala, Dr Naughton. The library committee, by a majority of 12 to 2, declined to recommend the appointment of Miss Dunbar-Harrison to the County Council for appointment.

The climate of the time was highly contentious in regard to choice of literature. Two years earlier the State had enacted a very restrictive Censorship of Publications Act. Though the speeches in the library committee debate attempted to be temperate in tone they were, of course, characteristic of those conservative, pre-ecumenical times. Not so temperate, however, were the County Council debates which followed and which were reported in full by the *Connaught Telegraph* and other papers every week from 13 December 1930 into 1931. There was strong opposition to central government taking control of local appointments. The County Council felt let down by central Government, which had been promoting Irish so much that even the farm steward at the Mental Hospital was required to be proficient in it. The guarantee that Miss Dunbar would be required to reach a certain level of proficiency within three years did not satisfy them.

Mayo County Council therefore adopted the recommendation of their Library Committee and refused to appoint Miss Dunbar on the grounds that she did not have a proficiency in Irish. They also claimed that the candidate was under the

required age of twenty-five. But these arguments became forgotten in later historical accounts of the dispute. While the alleged reason for the ultimate decision was her lack of competence in Irish, there were clearly deeper reasons. Much prejudice was shown to Trinity College and its history, and there was the underlying objection to the fact that the new librarian was a Protestant.

The Government of WT Cosgrave warned the County Council that they were acting outside their powers, as they were obliged by law to appoint her. Their powers extended only to inviting the nominated candidate to take up her appointment. As the Council again refused, the Minister of Local Government, in January 1931, formally dissolved Mayo County Council and appointed a Commissioner in its place. He duly appointed Miss Dunbar-Harrison and so the war began - with a boycott of the library service.

As part of the boycott, Committee members resigned from the Library and Vocational Education Council Committees and library books were returned from voluntary branch-libraries all over the county.

Inevitably, Dr Gilmartin, as the senior of three bishops whose dioceses straddled County Mayo, now became drawn into the dispute. But by this time, the die was cast and many people had become set in their attitudes. A recently discovered file in the Diocesan archives, (now catalogued as B4/8-ii/37), contains correspondence in connection with the affair. Archdeacon Fallon, PP Castlebar, who had acted for four years on the Library Committee, writing to the archbishop in late January 1931, said it had been a constant battle to guard against unsuitable books and that the Committee had depended very much on the good judgment of the previous librarian, Miss Redmond. He suggested that the only solution to the crux was that the position of the librarian should be regarded as an educational post and, especially in a county such as Mayo where the population was 99% Catholic, should consequently be regarded as a denominational post, just like that of teachers in the schools.

The mesh was becoming more and more difficult to untangle. The matter was so serious that William T Cosgrave, President of the Executive Council, sent Sir Joseph Glynn to visit Dr Gilmartin to assure him that there had been no political or sinister interference by Government in the nomination. Undoubtedly he was hoping that Dr Gilmartin would act as a mediator in a dispute which caused such potential embarrassment to the Government and, indeed, to the newly-founded Free State.

Sir Joseph Glynn brought with him a synopsis from President Cosgrave detailing the process followed in the selection process. Miss Dunbar-Harrison had not qualified under the first advertisement, which had insisted on Irish as a requirement, but because of the alleged shortage of librarians with Irish, a second advertisement had to be inserted for five counties including Mayo. The second advertisement stated merely that preference would be given to persons competent in Irish. Miss Dunbar-Harrison, who did not have to be interviewed in the second round, had achieved 320 marks out of 700 and was fourth in order of merit, but she was regarded as the only reasonably qualified candidate who had listed Mayo as one of her preferences. She had worked in Dublin for a total of fifteen months as a library worker. A locally-supported candidate, a Miss Ellen Burke, was not approved by the Commission as she had gained only 250 marks and did not have a competent knowledge of Irish. The members of the Selection Commission were all Dublin-based public officials.

Dr Gilmartin was absent in Lourdes on the date of the visit to Tuam of Sir Joseph Glynn, but the Diocesan Secretary, Fr James Fergus, wrote to the archbishop on 26 February 1931 to say that President Cosgrave would welcome a meeting with him in Dublin on his way back to Tuam. There had been a request from Cosgrave that the Mayo bishops would not mention the dispute in their Lenten Pastorals. In fact, Msgr Joseph Walsh, the Vicar-General, contacted the printers about this, as Archbishop Gilmartin had included an oblique reference to it in his Pastoral. However, it was too late to make any alteration, but he apparently succeeded with the two other bishops, as their Pastorals did not contain any reference to the dispute.

In the second section of his Lenten Pastoral for 1931, when dealing with Catholic Action, Dr Gilmartin appealed to the people to support the work of the Catholic Truth Society in promoting Catholic literature. In this connection, he said that, as the modern world was teeming with all sorts of books and it was difficult to discriminate between what was good and what was bad, it was 'gratifying to see how the representatives of the Catholic people are unwilling to subsidise libraries not under Catholic control. Not to speak of those who are alien to our faith, it is not every Catholic who is fit to take charge of a public library for Catholic readers. Such an onerous position should be assigned to an educated Catholic who would be as remarkable for his loyalty to his religion as for his literary or intellectual attainments'. He also went on to say that Catholic people likewise had a right to medical practitioners trained in schools where Catholic principles about child-birth and kindred subjects were taught.

It was a five-line reference in an eighteen-page Pastoral, and was probably unnoticed at the time, but it did express a definite point of view. Privately, however, a note in the same file indicates that Dr Gilmartin tried to have Miss Dunbar accepted as librarian for the present but with the hope that another position would be found for her.

Four letters from President Cosgrave to Archbishop Gilmartin, three of them in his own hand, written between 23 February and 11 April 1931, are also in the file. Writing on 4 March he thanked Dr Gilmartin for the frank discussion they had had in Dublin but he considered the situation as 'an apparent conflict between the discipline of the Catholic Church and the constitutional position of the State'. He referred to the archbishop's suggestion that perhaps a formal Concordat between State and Church was the way to go. While they would welcome an understanding and a resolution of the problem, Mr Cosgrave questioned whether 'this might be effected by a concordat as suggested by Your Grace'. Such a matter had never been before Government and 'would require the fullest consideration'. A formal Concordat had, in fact, been negotiated just two years earlier between the Italian Government and the Holy See.

Archbishop Gilmartin, clearly acting as a mediator, replied to President Cosgrave on 4 March 1931.

My dear President,

Many thanks for your letter. I am assured by those who have a right to speak that formal good relations will be restored if the following are agreed to:

The Mayo County Council to be elected next June as there is due a General Election and County Council elections all over Ireland.

The recognition by the Government that a librarianship is an educational appointment and, as a consequence, that a place be found elsewhere for Miss Dunbar.
People cannot use the library until the principle is accepted and Miss Dunbar leaves.

If these terms are agreed to, all would be free to function in the Vocational Committee etc.

Yours sincerely,
+ T P Gilmartin.

A working-draft of this letter, in the hand-writing of Monsignor Joseph Walsh, argued that if the priests were to support the library now, 'the laymen who had fought would be let down by the priests and a great blow would be struck at religion – a blow which would recoil more and more on us as the years go by'. Dr Gilmartin, however, chose not to use those sentiments in his letter to the President.

President Cosgrave, in a long reply of 11 March 1931, and in his own handwriting, thanked Dr Gilmartin for his efforts. He said however, that 'those whom Your Grace was so kind to consult' did not seem to grasp the position of the Government in that 'to discriminate in those appointments in favour of, or against any citizen, on the grounds of religion, would be to repudiate some of the fundamental principles on which the State was founded'. He referred to the idea of considering the post of librarians as educational and, therefore denominational in character, but he added: 'that the post could be regarded as an educational post is open to considerable doubt'.

There is no doubt that Dr Gilmartin was under severe pressure from all sides. His character was to be moderate generally in views and actions. This dispute was really a political struggle and not of his making. The episode had involved at least two meetings in Dublin between the archbishop and WT Cosgrave, President of the Irish Free State, to try to reach a solution. Cardinal Mac Rory, writing to Gilmartin on 11 April 1931, shows that he regarded the situation as very serious and he intimated that he understood there might even be resignations from Government over the affair.

Ultimately, eight months after the efforts of Dr Gilmartin to reach a solution, before the impending General Election, in February 1932, Miss Dunbar-Harrison was quietly transferred to a similar position in the Military Library in Dublin, her native city.

Church Synods

In 1933 Archbishop Gilmartin presided over a Provincial Synod for the dioceses of the west. The outcome was the 'book of rules', largely for clerics, applying regionally the general norms of the 1918 Code of Canon Law. He organised a Tuam Diocesan synod held on 4 and 5 July 1937, which enacted more specific Diocesan Statutes. It was the last such synod to be held in the diocese. Diocesan Synods were envisaged by the 1917 Code to be held every ten years. These synods were very formal affairs, exclusively clerical gatherings, and the single

legislator was, of course, the bishop himself. The decrees, disciplinary and liturgical, were directed towards clergy and laity, covering the Sacraments, devotional life, preaching programmes, and regulations concerning schools, property, churches and penalties imposed by the synod.

The decrees make interesting reading and are important in reflecting the mind-set of the Church at a particular time in the Church's effort, by detailed regulations, to achieve 'best practice'. They provide many insights for church-historians. For instance one decree prohibited priests from writing in newspapers or giving interviews on any subject without the express permission of the archbishop. Arrangements were made for special examinations of priests in the early years after ordination and before appointment as parish priests. The acceptance of any special collection or gift from the people or any organisation merited automatic suspension. Each parish was encouraged to have a parochial hall for 'the appropriate recreation of the youth and for various activities of Catholic action'. The sin of perjury, before a court or tribunal, was declared to be a 'reserved sin', which only the archbishop, or a certain delegated priest, could absolve. A new regulation was created whereby the remains of a deceased parishioner should always be brought to the church for one night prior to burial. Thereby the last vestige of the secrecy of the Penal Days was abolished.

In the lengthy Appendices various exhortations for the spiritual lives of priests and lay people were outlined in some detail. Detailed study programmes were specified covering Theology, Canon Law and Sacred Liturgy for examination of clergy. An exact three-year programme for the preaching of Catechetical Instructions was laid down, topics being specified for each Sunday of the year. Exact regulations were enacted to cover all matters related to parish finance.

The Synod itself did not involve detailed discussion or debate. It was a formal enacting and promulgation of the decrees, those newly created, and those carried over from previous Synods. It was a way of alerting the body of the clergy and the faithful to the sacredness of their calling. The event, however, took two days of liturgical ceremonial.

Another major liturgical gathering for which Archbishop Gilmartin was responsible was the Catholic Truth Society Congress held at Tuam from 27–29 June 1936. It was an iconic religious event, in the mould of the Eucharistic Congress itself, which comprised impressive liturgies and ceremonial, indoor and outdoor, as well as addresses by notable figures of the time.

Dr Gilmartin and Knock

Dr Gilmartin was the first archbishop to acknowledge publicly the Apparition of Knock, though he was always insistent that his actions were not to be taken as ecclesiastical recognition. On 21 August 1929 a large group from St Michan's Church in Dublin had organised a special pilgrimage to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the alleged apparition at Knock in 1879. Dr Gilmartin had agonised over the invitation to attend but had decided to decline. However on the morning of the 21st, while reading his breviary in his garden, he came to a different decision and instructed his driver, James, to prepare the car to bring him to Knock. On the journey, at Barnacarroll, they had an extraordinary escape from a serious road accident and avoided death. The event touched Dr Gilmartin deeply, indeed he considered it a miracle.

Pilgrims at the original gable of Knock church, pre 1930.

His Grace, in his public address later that day, while standing on a Calvary mound outside the church, made it clear that his attendance was not to be taken as church approval of the apparition. Nevertheless, he spoke warmly of Knock and the devotion to the Blessed Virgin. He added that it was sad that nothing was available at Knock to make pilgrims comfortable.[107] His address touched a chord in the heart of a young Mrs J C Coyne who had come to Knock on that day merely to meet some friends from Dublin there. Ever afterwards Judy Coyne gave her life to the promotion of Knock. The foundation of the Knock Shrine Society in 1935 by herself and her husband, Liam, with Dr Gilmartin's approval, was a milestone in Knock's development as a centre of pilgrimage and Marian devotion. Their story has, fortunately, been recorded in Judy Coyne's memoir, published in 2004.[108]

In 1936 Archbishop Gilmartin set up the second Knock Enquiry Commission to examine further the evidence for the truth of the alleged apparition at Knock. In a letter to Liam Coyne on 17 January 1936 Dr Gilmartin wrote: 'you and Mrs Coyne will be glad to hear that we have sent a appeal for the recognition of Knock as a Shrine of Our Lady to Rome.' He suggested further that Mr Coyne would send a copy of his book on Knock directly to the Papal Nuncio, Archbishop Paschal Robinson.[109]

Three years later, and only a few weeks before he died, Archbishop Gilmartin confided to Mrs Coyne: 'I know you may be disappointed that I did not do more for Knock but I prayed twice a day for twenty years for direction, and I did all I could, that I had permission for, but one day you will see a great church built in Knock'. He had determined early on he would do nothing about Knock until he was asked to do so by lay people. 'You two were these people (referring to her husband Liam and herself), and this was the sign for me'.[110] The 1936 Commission of Enquiry was extremely painstaking and continued for three years. The papers detailing the process are in the Tuam Diocesan archives and the report was sent to Rome in 1939, shortly before the death of Archbishop Gilmartin. [111]

His Travels

Throughout his life Dr Gilmartin took a great interest in the Church world-wide, particularly France and mainland Europe. He became proficient in French by correspondence courses as a young man, and all his life he was a great traveller, at a time when such a practice was far from common. As representative of the Irish bishops, he visited Sydney in 1928 for the Eucharistic Congress. He

attended also the Congress in Chicago, Argentina and the Philippines and twice visited the Holy Land. Late in his life, as recorded below, he represented the Irish Church at ceremonials in New Zealand. He was former colleague and a lifetime friend from his Maynooth days of the great Archbishop Daniel Mannix of Melbourne, whom he visited on two occasions.

After an illness lasting two short months, Dr Gilmartin died on 15 October 1939, aged seventy-eight. The national newspapers described him as a great churchman and a noted lover of all things Irish, language, music and culture, and a great promoter of new schools, churches and parochial buildings. Bishop Joseph Walsh, who knew him so well, speaking at his Requiem Mass, described him as 'an example of humility, personal holiness, with an ardent zeal for souls'.[112] A lyrical appreciation signed simply 'CC', probably Fr Con Cunningham, a curate in Tuam for many years, appeared in the *Irish Independent* on the day after the funeral.:

> He went through life seeking always to pluck in God's vineyard the fruit that else might fall and asking no other than an increase of harvest. Humility was the foundation

Catholic Truth Society Congress in the grounds of the Cathedral, Tuam, June 1936.

> of his spiritual outlook … his sermons were fiery words to the hearts of his listeners for they were thoughts distilled from the meditations of a lifetime. The students of his time in Maynooth can never forget the sparkle and human touch of his lectures; his priests will not easily forget his fatherly advice in conference, nor the Cathedral congregation the homely little Sunday morning talks on the Gospel. He was a son of the people, the people were his dear children and the poorer, the dearer.

Dr Gilmartin was buried alongside his three predecessors in the crypt under the old High Altar of the Cathedral, the last archbishop of Tuam to be buried within the Cathedral itself. At his funeral his remaining siblings attending were Sr. M. Canisius, Carysfort, Dublin and Mrs Kate Mullaghy of Castlebar (sisters). Other relatives present were two nephews, Thomas Bathgate and Thomas Moran, and his niece, Mrs John Denning, all of Castlebar.

ARCHBISHOP JOSEPH WALSH 1940-69

At the meeting of the Cathedral Chapter of 18 October 1939 which had been summoned by the Dean of the Chapter, Monsignor E.A. D'Alton, the Auxiliary Bishop, Dr Joseph Walsh was appointed as Vicar-Capitular, or Administrator, of the diocese during the interregnum. Interestingly the Chapter Minutes record that there were nine votes in favour of Dr Walsh and one vote in favour of the Monsignor D'Alton.[113] It can reasonably be conjectured, because of what appears below, that the single vote cast against the then Canon Walsh was his own vote.

Joseph Walsh was to be the second longest reigning of the archbishops of the diocese since 1700. Those who grew accustomed to his strong personality, his exacting standards and his seemingly assured style of leadership in the years from 1940-1969 would have unanimously considered he was a bishop 'to the manner born'. He was so committed to his mission and so scrupulous and finicky in every detail of church government that any observer would have formed the opinion that episcopal rule and administration was almost in his blood. The facts below, as now discovered about the manner of his appointment, are at complete variance with the normally accepted view that this was so.

Joseph Walsh, one of a family of thirteen, was a son of RJ and Elizabeth Walsh who carried on a general business in Newport, Co. Mayo. He attended St Jarlath's College in Tuam and Maynooth College, where he was selected to take a Master's Degree and was ordained in 1914. He was destined, uniquely, to spend all his priestly life in the town of Tuam. It has always been known, among Tuam priests, that at some stage in his career, Joseph Walsh had expressed a wish to go on the Missions, specifically with the Society of the Maynooth Mission to China, or the Columban Missionaries. Most people, however, considered this was merely a passing whim of his. What is not known was that, in fact, he had fought a

relentless campaign to pursue this goal over a period of fourteen years from 1917 to 1931.

The Columbans had been co-founded in 1916, in a blaze of glory, by his diocesan colleague and classmate in St Jarlath's, Fr John Blowick, and a Fr John Galvin from Cork. Its headquarters were then at Dalgan, Shrule, Co Galway. Because Joseph Walsh spent an extra year in Maynooth, completing his Masters Degree, he was ordained one year after Fr Blowick. On 24 September 1917, just one year after the foundation of the Columbans, the first of many letters from the Society detailed for the young Fr Joseph Walsh the procedures required prior to his entering the Society. Fr John Blowick wrote to him as 'Dear Joe' and advised him that matters could be greatly simplified if he made his application before the Roman authorities accepted the new draft constitution in the following month or so. Another classmate from Maynooth, Fr Paul Waldron of Aghamore, had already joined the Society. Another contemporary, Fr John Heneghan, a revered curate in Tuam until 1916, had also joined and also encouraged Joseph Walsh to come as soon as he could. However, as Archbishop John Healy was then in the last year of his life and in poor health, the matter was, of necessity, deferred.

When Archbishop Gilmartin, in an earlier life, had been Dean in Maynooth College before 1909, he would have known Joseph Walsh as a young Tuam student. Almost from the outset of his ministry in Tuam in 1918, Thomas Gilmartin noticed the potential of this young priest-teacher then in St Jarlath's College. He called on him on occasions to act as Diocesan Secretary and formally appointed him to the full-time post of Diocesan Secretary and personal Secretary to the archbishop in August 1919.

Amazingly, the same Joseph Walsh was appointed as Vicar-General of the diocese in 1924, when he was only ten years in the priesthood. What caused Archbishop Gilmartin to make such an unusual appointment? The answer may lie in the collection of forgotten personal letters retained by Joseph Walsh, which have now been uncovered in the Diocesan archives. They throw much light on what was his deepest ambition.[114] They cover the period from 1917-1937.

Archbishop Gilmartin had been aware of the desire of Joseph Walsh to join the Columbans even in the time of Archbishop Healy. He would perhaps have been reluctant to see any more of his brightest luminaries leave the diocese, so no

permission was given. But again in 1922 a further series of letters led to the archbishop writing to Joseph Walsh on 31 May as follows:

> 'I do not feel at liberty to comply with your request to join the Chinese Mission without further serious consideration. There is no favour in my power that I would not be willing to grant you but in this case the interests of the diocese are seriously affected. Possibly I have also resisted through selfish reasons, but when all comes to all, we shall both, I hope, do whatever is God's will'.

Just two months earlier, when going on holidays, he had given Joseph Walsh the powers of Vicar-General during this and any other absence of the archbishop. It would seem from this that, in the eyes of Thomas Gilmartin, Joseph Walsh was destined for high office. In late 1922 he had offered to allow Joseph Walsh to pursue a course in Rome for a doctorate in Canon Law and he added that his own experience in Italy had convinced him that a practical knowledge of Italian was 'very necessary for a bishop and especially for a secretary who had to deal with many matters with the Roman authorities'. Joseph Walsh, however, did not take up the offer to go to Rome.

In a four-page letter dated 27 December 1923 to Joseph Walsh, Dr Gilmartin said now again for a third time a request to join the Columbans had come before him. He wrote: 'if your conscience calls you to other work, while I could not think of obtruding my selfishness in your way, we must both give careful and full consideration to the claims of the diocese'. He then outlined five reasons weighing heavily on him in coming to a decision: if anything happened to himself, who else but his secretary would be in a position to 'hand on the Curia' to his successor; there were also legal problems since Joseph Walsh was one of the trustees of the diocese. Also at that time there were no spare priests available to him. The diocese, he said, had already given 'a large contribution to the priests of the Chinese Mission'. He added that there were personal reasons also which ' if I mentioned them should, I believe, offend your modesty'. Finally he added that he had once said a novena of Masses for light on how to deal with this very difficult request. Now he intended to commence another such novena.

It is clear that Dr Gilmartin felt he was greatly dependent on his young assistant if he was to carry on his work as archbishop adequately. He even told him that he had in mind transferring Fr Walsh to the parish of Tuam where he could remain on as chancellor and continue to be available to him.

The archbishop's determined 'grooming' of Joseph Walsh for higher office should have been evident by his decision of 31 July 1924 to appoint him formally as Vicar-General of the diocese. Just a month previously there had again been correspondence to Joseph Walsh from the Columbans' new Superior General, Fr Michael O'Dwyer, about the legalities in regard to Joseph Walsh's possible reception into the Society. One might well ask if the two events were connected.

In his reply to the invitation to become Vicar-General, Joseph Walsh wrote to Archbishop Gilmartin on 8 August 1924: 'I am glad to accept, since you say that the arrangements made at the last Chapter meeting stand'. This surely means that Joseph Walsh's accepting of the post of Vicar-General was a conditional one. In his mind, this was a purely temporary measure and he had a clear understanding that his real desire to join the Chinese Missions, now being expressed for seven years, was still a live issue.

He confirmed this intention when, a year later, on 18 July 1925, he wrote as follows to Dr Michael O'Dwyer at Dalgan Park, Shrule. Now the matter was becoming more definite.

> My dear Dr O'Dwyer,
> I beg to apply for admission to your Society. I shall come to you as soon as I can but I fear I cannot go before October or November, as I have promised to wait until His Grace the Archbishop has had a holiday.
> Would you kindly let me know what preparations I am to make.
> If you accept me, I shall of course carry out all the Rules of the Society.
> Sincerely Yours,
> Joseph S Walsh.

So it would appear from this that by now at last he had received the tacit approval of the archbishop to leave the diocese.

Dr O'Dwyer, in a private note attached to his formal letter of reply to Joseph Walsh, indicated that he had also received a letter from Archbishop Gilmartin. Significantly, the archbishop had asked Dr O'Dwyer for a wording in his response which would make it easy for him to refuse Joseph Walsh's request.

Dr O'Dwyer, in his letter of 20 July 1925 to the archbishop said he was sorry to learn that His Grace's health had not been so good for some time past. Perhaps,

again, Dr Gilmartin had an excuse to delay the release of his Vicar General and confidant. In any case, there is no further correspondence on the matter for another six years.

In 1926 Joseph Walsh was released from his position as Secretary to the archbishop to become Administrator of the Cathedral and the parish of Tuam. 'Canon Joe', as he was affectionately known in Tuam town, seems to have got a new lease of life in his new pastoral role. He became highly popular, among rich and poor. After a little more than two years, however, he was appointed President of St Jarlath's College despite the efforts of a strong delegation of parishioners of Tuam who pleaded with Dr Gilmartin to leave their own Canon Joe as Administrator. However, as President of the College for ten years he effected enormous improvements in the college and became known to a generation of pupils who, despite his eccentricities and fancies, yet respected him enormously.

The Chinese Mission was still on his mind. In a remarkable letter from St Jarlath's College to Archbishop Gilmartin dated 2 July 1931, Joseph Walsh, now aged forty-three, wrote as follows:

> My Lord Archbishop,
> As the Diocese has more than a full supply of priests, I again ask permission to go on the Foreign Missions. Since so many priests are available, there ought to be no difficulty in my getting away this summer.
> You know already the Offices and Honours, which I held, were given and accepted by me on the express condition that I was to be allowed to go on the foreign Mission. I hereby resign all these offices and Honours — I should never have accepted them, had I thought the promise of letting me go would not be fulfilled.
> Your obedient servant,
> Joseph S Walsh.

The frankness and determination expressed here belies the common opinion that Joseph Walsh was a close ally of Archbishop Gilmartin and that he willingly accepted the archbishop's desire that he would eventually be his successor.

In his hand-written reply, Archbishop Gilmartin says that this letter upset him very much as he had thought the problem 'was now stabilised'. With regard to the offices to which he had been appointed, he assured Joseph Walsh that these were

not given as personal favours but 'in the interests of the diocese'. Then he pulled rank, as he reminded him that a priest was obliged to continue to fulfil the duties assigned to him in accordance with Canon 128. Any priest could, of course, appeal to a higher quarter, but in the absence of a contrary decision, the archbishop could not accept this resignation. He invited him to discuss the matter with him on the following Monday at 12 noon.

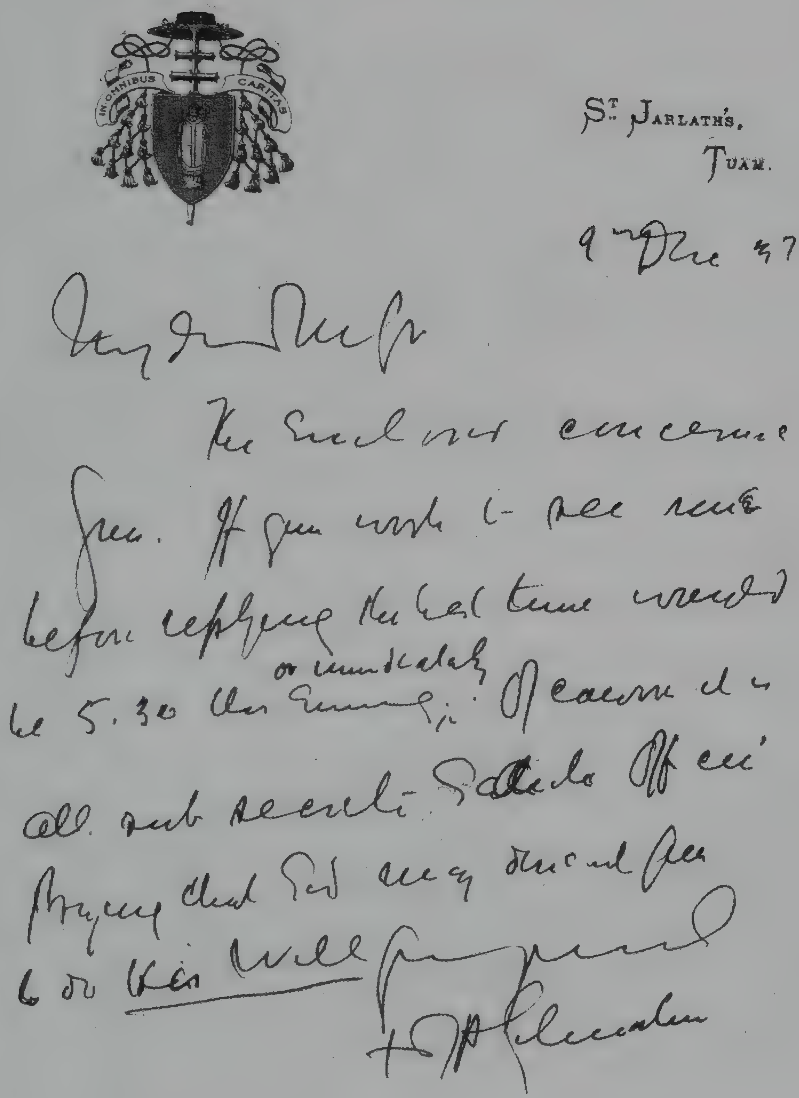
Subsequently, the archbishop must have regretted the heavy hand of his reply, because two days later, on 5 July, he again wrote to Joseph Walsh to say that, if he still thought he had a vocation for the foreign missions that he would give him permission to leave. He thanked him for all the help he had given him in the administration of the diocese. He expected that he would not leave until all things were settled up in the College. He ended simply: 'may the will of God be done'.

No record exists of the meeting between them following on this exchange. Both of them were intensely spiritual men, and despite the natural tensions, distance and mutual respect they had for each other, it would appear a decision was arrived at that the 'will of God' was being made known through the needs of the archbishop and, above all, the needs of the diocese. In any case, the *contretemps* seems to have ended Joseph Walsh's fourteen years campaign to leave the diocese and join the Columban Missionaries.

The appointment of an Auxiliary Bishop, 1937

Canon Joseph Walsh continued on happily as President of St Jarlath's. However others might have seen him as a likely successor to Archbishop Gilmartin, Joseph Walsh must have felt that his staying in the diocese no longer involved such a danger. This was especially so when the Galway diocese became vacant at Christmas 1936, and though the name of Joseph Walsh was frequently mentioned in clerical circles, another Tuam priest, Dr Michael Browne, a Professor in Maynooth College, was appointed as Bishop of Galway in August 1937. Joseph Walsh could easily have felt that Dr Browne, being a Tuam diocesan priest, would now probably transfer to Tuam as its next archbishop, whenever the see would become vacant.

The prospect of Dr Browne coming to Tuam must also have passed through the mind of Archbishop Gilmartin. He decided to take action to prevent this but never discussed the matter with his Vicar-General, Joseph Walsh. Soon after the accession of Michael Browne to Galway, the archbishop secretly began to make



St. Jarlath's,
Tuam.

9th Dec 37

My dear Msgr

The enclosed concerns you. If you wish to see me before replying the best time would be 5.30 this evening or immediately. Of course it is all sub secreto S. Officii.

Praying that God may direct you to His Will

Yours sincerely

+ T. Gilmartin

Dr Gilmartin's letter to Msgr Walsh informing him of his appointment.

his own plans for Tuam. He formally applied to Rome to be granted an auxiliary bishop to assist him in his work. He nominated as his choice, his Vicar-General, Canon Joseph Walsh of Newport, then President of St Jarlath's College.

On 1 December 1937 the Nuncio, Dr Paschal Robinson, wrote to Archbishop Gilmartin to inform him that the Holy Father had graciously acceded to his request for an Auxiliary and that he had designated to that office 'the person you suggested'. As 'the person' must be notified, the Nuncio said he would write to him on the morrow, unless His Grace had telegraphed him to the contrary. The Nuncio, Dr Robinson, had always been friendly with Dr Gilmartin, having stayed with him for several days on the occasion of the CTS Congress in 1936. He now facilitated Gilmartin, who had asked especially that, as he was about to go on a visit to New Zealand on 6 January 1938, a new Auxiliary might be appointed and consecrated before he left Ireland.

Rather than calling in Joseph Walsh to tell him the news, Archbishop Gilmartin sent the Nuncio's letter directly to him, informing him simply that that he was the 'person' in question in the letter of appointment. He invited him to come to see him, if he wished, before replying to the Nuncio. The letter came as a great shock and surprise to the recipient.

Below is Joseph Walsh's considered reply. It is worth reflecting on in some detail.

> 2 December 1937.
>
> My dear Lord Archbishop,
> I am very grateful indeed for your letter. I will not attempt to express my gratitude, as I could not hope to give any kind of adequate expression to my sentiments.
> With regard to the subject matter of the letter — I am very sorry but I could not think of accepting such an honour. Full well I know how totally unfit I am; besides the whole thing is repugnant to my nature. May I request that you will not consider me wanting in gratitude or obedience, when I ask that the matter will not be pursued any further.
>
> Your obedient servant,
> Joseph S. Walsh.

The decision was repeated in another letter of the following day. 'My opinion is unchanged. In accordance with your request I will write tonight or tomorrow to His Excellency the Nuncio'.

St. Ignatius, College,
Guam,

2 December 1937.

My dear Lord Archbishop,

I am very grateful indeed for your letter. I will not attempt to express my gratitude, as I could not hope to give any kind of adequate expression to my sentiments.

With regard to the subject matter of the letter -- I am very sorry I could not think of accepting such an honour. Full well I know how totally unfit I am ; besides the whole thing is, repugnant to my nature .

May I request then that you will not consider me wanting in gratitude or obedience, when I ask that the matter will not be pursued any further.

Your obedient servant,

Josh S. Walsh.

Msgr Joseph Walsh declines appointment as Auxiliary Bishop.

What did the phrase 'the whole thing is repugnant to my nature' mean? At this remove, one can only speculate. However it can be said that Joseph Walsh was a person of a nervous disposition and he could easily have recoiled from the prospect of public ceremonial and indeed the administrative side and the decision-making inherent in the ministry of a bishop. As a former Diocesan Secretary he knew how much a bishop suffered in making decisions about so many persons' lives and church affairs. He was aware too, as many priests were to come to know later, that he himself was of a tense and fretful disposition and seldom relaxed.

What indeed is most revealing is that the news had come 'not only as a surprise, but as a great shock'. This he confirmed in his letter to the Nuncio on the following day. On this occasion he repeated the phrase 'repugnant to my nature', and added 'repugnant to my nature and training'. His refusal of the office was his considered opinion. In a strange phrase at the end of the letter he says 'a short time in office would convince everybody that here was another case: '*capax imperii, nisi imperat'*. It means that one is often considered suitable for an office, until he actually takes that office. He was afraid of his own indecisive nature and his over-scrupulous tendencies if he were given such a position of leadership.

By then, Canon Walsh's refusal had been relayed to the Papal Nuncio, Dr Robinson, by Archbishop Gilmartin. The Nuncio, however, had replied that he was obliged by Roman requirements to ask the designated person *viva voce* whether or not he accepted the position in question. The fact that the person designated was not disposed to accept was a matter of regret to him, as the Holy See, in order to expedite matters on this occasion, had not asked His Grace to submit a *terna,* as was usually required in such cases. In this way Dr Gilmartin would be enabled to have the consecration completed before his departure to the Far East. The Nuncio still hoped that the 'person concerned' might be induced to reconsider his refusal; otherwise, he adds: 'he will cause the Holy See no small disappointment and embarrassment'.

This was the climate in which Joseph Walsh approached the Old Papal Nunciature in the Phoenix Park beside the Vice-Regal Lodge on 7 December 1937. Dr Gilmartin had to tell him where the residence was, and he added: 'the drivers know the address'.

Nuncios are trained to underline the nature of the episcopal calling, the supremacy of the will of God and the wishes of the Holy See. There is no record

of the interview with Joseph Walsh but on his arrival home from Dublin that evening he discussed the matter again with Dr Gilmartin and then wrote the following letter to the Papal Nuncio, Archbishop Paschal Robinson:

> May it please Your Excellency,
>
> Since I wrote to you on 4th December, I have re-considered the situation and discussed it fully with His Grace the Archbishop.
>
> While I still prefer not to accept the office for which I have been designated, I leave myself without reserve and with deepest humility in the hands of the Holy See, and I will accept the decision with entire obedience,
>
> I have the honour to remain
> Your obedient, humble servant,
> Joseph S. Walsh.

Monsignor Walsh was at that time President of St Jarlath's College and, naturally, the announcement in mid-December that he was to become a bishop was greeted with tremendous cheering by the students of St Jarlath's College. A small delegation of pupils went to find the President to convey the students' congratulations. On the deputation was a young Michael Walsh of Aghamore, who was later to become his Diocesan Secretary and later still the executor of his will. Monsignor Michael Walsh recalls that he was amazed to find Joseph Walsh so uncharacteristically nervous. At the end of the interview, the Bishop-Elect turned to the delegation of teenage boys with great earnestness to plead with them 'please pray for me'. The mask was off, and this complex figure was showing his true self. His anguished appeal for prayers were to be repeated many time in the following days as the people of Tuam thronged to congratulate him, whom they would continue to refer to as 'Canon Joe'.

At the subsequent Christmas Prize-giving at St Jarlath's College, Archbishop Gilmartin frankly admitted that he knew 'how averse the new bishop was to accepting the honour, but like a good disciple of the Master, he left himself in the hands of the Vicar of Christ, realising that obedience was better than following one's own inclinations'. Dr Gilmartin even acknowledged that he himself was responsible for putting this onus on him.

'I hope he will forgive me for refusing him permission more than once, in the earlier years of his career, to join the Chinese Mission, for had this permission been granted, he might now be wearing his martyr's crown with Fr Tierney, in heaven. In a sense he has to blame himself, for though I have profound sympathy with the foreign missions, I felt that, in conscience, I could not at the time part with a priest who had shown such unusual capacity for services needed in the diocese for which he was ordained. But as you, my young friends, know from your reading of the classics: 'There is a divinity that doth shape our ends, rough-hew them as we may'. It is, I feel sure, the over-riding providence of God that has placed Monsignor Walsh in the position which he now occupies'.[115]

The frankness of the archbishop, though spoken in a semi-private setting, was published in the local newspaper. Somehow, however, this essential element concerning the reluctance of Joseph Walsh to be a bishop slipped completely from the diocesan folk-memory.

The consecration of the new Bishop of Cela, Joseph Walsh, took place less than three weeks later, on Sunday 2 January 1938. The reason for the swift celebration of the ordination ceremony was to facilitate Archbishop Gilmartin, who shortly afterwards left for New Zealand where he represented the Irish Church at the centenary of the founding of the Church by Irish missionaries in that country. Dr Walsh did not let the occasion pass without paying this tribute to the missionary Society he had so much wished to join. He was proud, he said that from his own class in Maynooth had come 'priests who had founded one of the most important movements of modern times - the Maynooth Mission to China'.[116]

The preacher at the consecration ceremony was none other than the Bishop of Galway, Dr Michael Browne. Ironically, it is commonly believed that Archbishop Gilmartin's hope was that once Joseph Walsh became an Auxiliary Bishop, then he would become the most likely successor and the advent of Dr Browne to Tuam be less likely. Dr Browne spoke enthusiastically of the special gifts of Joseph Walsh, which, he said, made him 'as well equipped as man could be for the duties of the episcopate'.[117] He mentioned in particular his fine academic achievements and his unique experience of pastoral and diocesan administration.

Dr Gilmartin and Bishop Joseph Walsh – undated.

His Appointment as Archbishop

When Archbishop Gilmartin died on 14 October 1939, Joseph Walsh was by then, in the view of priests and people, the obvious heir-apparent. In the interim, he had made himself very approachable to the priests of the diocese, who now got to know him better. Though some priests and people, particularly from the Westport area, might have still opted for Bishop Michael Browne of Galway, it can be said with some certainty that it was no surprise when Dr Joseph Walsh was formally appointed as Archbishop of Tuam on 16 January 1940.

Dr Walsh's spirit of approachability however did not stay with him when he had the ultimate responsibility as Archbishop. His nervous disposition made him somewhat unpredictable and among many priests there grew an inordinate sense of trepidation when approaching Joseph Walsh. Even a cursory survey of the files in the diocesan archives will reveal how intimately he was involved in the minutiae of administration in every parish in the diocese. No building project or major incident occurred without being referred for his observations.

By nature he was somewhat unsure of himself, as is apparent from the hesitation he showed about becoming an Auxiliary Bishop. Working from morning to late night, trying to 'micro-manage' so many projects in so many parts of the diocese, he imposed an enormous strain on himself. His own initial fears about his inadequacies for the office of Bishop became very real for him in those early years as Archbishop. He was so afraid of losing control that he became rather authoritarian and centralised in his administration. He was therefore to gain a reputation among them for severity and, even, heartlessness on occasions. By the mid 1940's he had a serious health scare and, after treatment, had to accept medical advice and adopt a rigid regime of regular exercise and daily bed-rest each day for the remainder of his life. It did not however hinder him from continuing to take a hands-on part in the life of every parish in the diocese.

***Lá an Easpuig* - Visitation of Aran with escort of boats.**

'Tempestuous Energy'

The Minutes of Clergy Conference for his regime, held three times a year in each of the deaneries, illustrate a much more detailed concentration on the minutiae of

priestly duties, compared with those of his predecessor. Dr Gilmartin, of course, had never had direct parish pastoral experience and his conferences therefore tended to concentrate on broader issues, while leaving the details to the good judgment of his priests. He promoted strongly the learning of Gregorian Chant in all the parishes for special events and in particular the Solemn Requiem High Masses. The Conferences of Dr Walsh were filled with various announcements of things that needed to be attended to in the parishes: the Lenten Fast regulations in all their fine minutiae, the promotion in the parishes of the saving of petrol and promotion of the growing of cereals to replace imports in war-time, the 'Save the Derrynane Fund' in memory of Daniel O'Connell, and urging priests to support many more desirable projects: the promotion of *Muintir na Tíre* guilds and, during war-time, the promotion of societies like the Irish Red Cross, the Local Defence Forces and the Local Security Forces. He was also forever encouraging the growing of beet throughout the diocese to save the Tuam factory.

One of his on-going bugbears throughout his life was that the people, and indeed the priests, would become confused about Mass times on the Sundays in October and March when the official time changed. He therefore had a regulation that Mass times would be according to the time in operation in the preceding week and therefore that the clock would not be changed until after Last Mass on the Sunday! The regulation was recognised merely as a quirk of his nature and, in the simplicity of the times, was accepted with equanimity. One particular emphasis was his discouraging of 'all-night dances' and for this reason many parochial halls were built in towns and villages in the early 1940's to cater for social needs and to minimise perceived dangers and abuses.

These were the days when clergy were prohibited by statute to attend race meetings or theatre. In 1943, he explained that priests were permitted to attend amateur plays within their own parish only, otherwise only by special permission. Only in 1957 was this rule withdrawn by the new Maynooth Statutes.

Dr Walsh's preaching style was memorable for its earnestness and simplicity. His sermons of course were of their time, deeply spiritual but often highly moralistic. So often his points were punctuated with the well-known pointers like 'mind this' or 'mark my words'. Slightly rushed in his delivery, his own deep spirituality was always evident. On the other hand, his written Pastoral Letters were much more formal, perhaps even stilted in tone. He was well aware that his Lenten pastorals, in common with those of his brother Bishops, would be published on the morrow in full, in the pages of the *Irish Independent* and the *Irish Press*.

Dr Walsh never drove a car and therefore depended on a chauffeur, paid or voluntary, but he compensated for his lack of physical contact with priests of the diocese by endless letters and by meetings in his house. Succeeding diocesan secretaries testify to his daily routine of long sessions of letter-dictation, every morning and late evening. These letters showed a sure and firm knowledge of every aspect of diocesan and parish affairs. Frequently the typed page included a much more forthright comment at the end, in his own hand, instantly recognised by his characteristic green ink.

The result was that clergy were always on their toes and therefore thought it prudent to seek his advice, even on minor projects. His knowledge was not confined to the ecclesiastical - his grasp of educational, legal and building matters was also prodigious. While this was helpful and freely available to the priests, his somewhat abrupt manner and style of leadership could inhibit local endeavour, as the bother of channelling every decision through Tuam was enough to put off many a person in a possible endeavour. Some priests, especially younger priests, found his style and manner refreshing, and were easy in debating points with him. But these were in the minority. However, these were the priests whom he respected most. Conversely, towards lay people, Archbishop Walsh could be very gracious in manner and was highly popular.

One of the less taxing of Dr Walsh's roles was 'throwing in the ball', at many of the major GAA matches.

His inner insecurity came to the fore particularly in the matter of clerical changes, a task he found increasingly a severe burden. He demanded extraordinary secrecy in this matter but this was to allow him space to reverse decisions by the day. When the list was completed, he immediately left Tuam to seek sanctuary with his sister, Mrs Duane, in Monkstown, Dublin. Inevitably however, some of the meeker of his curates, who could be relied on not to make any protest against an unwelcome change, found themselves, once again, appointed to another difficult or remote situation in the diocese.

One of his projects for which the diocese must be forever grateful was his insistence, announced at the deanery conferences of October 1941, that one priest in every parish was to be designated to compile a history of that particular parish, using local knowledge and any documented sources available. While the quality of these compilations, now in the diocesan archives, are somewhat uneven between their various parishes, they form an invaluable resource for historians, as their many authors, now deceased, had personal memories of events dating back to the late nineteenth century.

Dr Walsh and Knock

Dr Walsh's attachment to Knock as a great Marian Shrine was altogether different from the rather inhibited approach of Archbishop Gilmartin. Even while still only Auxiliary Bishop, he opened the season of pilgrimages in May 1938 when he blessed the outdoor Stations of the Cross. Thereafter he exercised more day-to-day control by his appointment of a series of younger priests as administrators, rather than as parish priests. Quite uncharacteristically for his time, he gave great recognition to the efforts of two lay-people, Liam and Judy Coyne. At a time when decisions about Church affairs were almost exclusively in clerical hands, these two founders and leaders of the Knock Shrine Society had direct access to the archbishop and the correspondence between them was enormous. This is obvious from the recently published memoir of Dame Judy Coyne.[118]

Dame Judy Coyne, Co-Founder of Knock Shrine Society.

The Diocesan archives and the Coyne Papers, now retained in Knock Shrine, include a series of letters from Joseph Walsh to Liam, and after his death, to his wife Judy Coyne, Secretary of the Knock Shrine Society. The letters covered matters connected with pilgrimages and Shrine developments. In fact, Joseph Walsh had been friendly with the Coynes as early as 1936 and in a personal letter to them, dated 15 March 1936, he was glad to tell them he knew that Archbishop Gilmartin was 'pushing the cause of Knock as fast as he can, but no further news from Rome lately'.[119]

Even from 1940, despite all the difficulties in relation to transport during the war, he led a pilgrimage to Knock almost every May and when the restrictions imposed by the Second World War were eased, Dr Walsh began a regular diocesan pilgrimage, usually held on the first Sunday of May. Throughout his episcopate he was at the heart of every development at the Shrine and was responsible for the appointment of a notable curate there in 1965, Fr James

Dr Walsh blessing the sick who had attended on stretchers for Mass in the Shrine grounds at Knock c 1955.

Horan. He was appointed its Administrator in 1967. In 1972 he was to be become the first Parish Priest of Knock since 1946. He was later to become the builder of the Basilica of Our Lady, Queen of Ireland and later still of Knock Airport.

Vatican Two

Archbishop Walsh, with all the Catholic Bishops of the world, journeyed to Rome for the four long sessions of the Second Vatican Council in the Autumn of each year from 1962 to 1965. He found the absence from Tuam a great irritant, whatever may have been the excitement and the wonder of that great event in the life of the Church. He himself had helped as a Consultor to the Liturgy Commission in the preparatory work of the Council. Dr Joseph Cunnane, who accompanied him in 1965, recalled that 'his energy, his thoroughness and his clear grasp of the problems of the Church showed themselves in this task, undertaken at the request of the Holy See when he was already approaching old age'.[120]

Dr Walsh always encouraged priests from the diocese to pursue post-graduate courses, especially in Theology. Tuam diocese therefore became famous in clerical circles for the number of priests with doctorates in Theology. He was

The Irish Bishops in audience with Pope John XXIII in Rome. Archbishop Walsh stands beside Pope John, on the right.

then, perhaps, better prepared for the enormous changes that were about to come in the wake of Vatican Two. His reign extended from the early war years to the years in which the decrees of the Vatican Council began to be implemented. All his life he was governed by an abiding spirit of obedience to the Church and showed a willingness to embrace change, wherever it was needed. Through the official conferences, he took a personal lead in the training of the priests in the reform of the Holy Week ceremonies in 1956. From the mid-sixties he was particularly involved in all the changes in the Liturgy resulting from the Second Vatican Council. The method chosen for the implementation of the change to the vernacular in the celebration of the Mass was a phased introduction, personally managed by him for the diocese. At first the vernacular was confined to the Scripture Readings and the Our Father and only in February 1966 was this permission extended through the Collect, the Secret Prayer and the Post-Communion prayer being permitted. In all, it took almost two years before the full Mass in English or Irish became established throughout the archdiocese. He instituted courses for up-dating his priests in modern emphases in theology in 1966 with an array of guest theologians and Scripture scholars.

Dr Walsh was the last archbishop to preside over the diocese with a surplus, or at least a plentiful supply, of clergy. There were up to 180 priests in the diocese in his later years and at the same time he had thirty-nine seminarians in Maynooth College and five in Carlow in 1969.

The Cathedral

One of Archbishop Walsh's particular concerns was to open up the Cathedral to the main street of Tuam. Since its erection, it had stood, unobtrusively, behind a high wall and the large gates beside the Presentation Convent property. An old private residence to the left of the entrance, used as a Pioneer Hall, further threw the Cathedral into obscurity. The 'Old Palace' gardens were still walled off, so almost no space was available for cars near the Cathedral. Archbishop Walsh had been carrying on a correspondence on this matter since the early 1950's with the parties concerned: the County Council and the ESB. The latter had a sub-station near the entrance to St Jarlath's College. Eventually he succeeded in greatly extending and landscaping the grounds.

He then turned his attention to the renovation of the Cathedral itself. The sanctuary in particular needed re-ordering in line with the general norms of the Second Vatican Council. The sanctuary had then nine steps to a central predella on which stood, not just the enormous bishops' throne, but also a *baldachino*, or

a huge canopy, purchased by Archbishop Kelly in Italy before his death. Dr Walsh said in a letter to an architect friend in 1952 'we have been trying for years to get rid of it'. Not only did it block the great East Window, but it made movement around the sanctuary rather hazardous and made parts of the sanctuary invisible to worshippers in the two transepts.

The old entrance to Tuam Cathedral showing the garden of the 'old Palace' still in place before 1960.

Finally, with the help of a local committee, and with Mr JR Boyd-Barrett as architect, agreement was reached on a plan to simplify the entire sanctuary. In early 1968 they inaugurated a fund-raising drive to raise £60,000 for the renovation of the sanctuary, to improve sight lines from the transepts and to carry out general renovations to the Cathedral. The renovations were so extensive that the Cathedral had to be shut down from August 1968 to 16 February 1969. During the renovations Sunday Masses were celebrated in the 'Las Vegas' and 'Phoenix' ballrooms in the town.

The sanctuary was greatly simplified to allow for the liturgical changes introduced by Vatican Two. The level of the sanctuary was considerably reduced, from nine to just three steps above the floor level. The items which had caused obstruction were removed, the baldachino, the bishop's throne, the pulpit and the canons' stalls. The effect now was that the great East window was again revealed, as it had not been since 1836. Everybody in the transepts now had an uninterrupted view of the sanctuary. Not so, however, with people in the nave of the church, as the morning light, bathing the altar through the low-slung Oriel window, had the effect of placing the Celebrant, now facing the people, in silhouette. As a result, the celebrant could now be identified by voice recognition only. There was some dissatisfaction also with the low-level of the altar, making visibility difficult to worshippers at the end of the Cathedral.

A view of the Cathedral sanctuary with the canopy, bishop's throne and canons' stalls prior to 1968.

The cathedral sanctuary after the renovation work of 1968-69.

As with many church re-orderings carried out in the 1960's, before more detailed Church guidelines were in place for the proper re-ordering of sanctuaries, the attempt in Tuam proved somewhat unsatisfactory and the sanctuary area was again renovated in 1990 under the church-artist, Mr Ray Carroll.

One unfortunate consequence of the work in 1968/69 was that, presumably, in order to strengthen the load-bearing quality of the timber floor for a solid altar, and to remove the necessity for the trapdoor to the crypt in the open sanctuary (the trap-door had been to the left of the old throne), it was decided to fill in the crypt underneath and provide a concrete floor. In this crypt four archbishops, from Dr John McHale to Thomas Gilmartin, had been buried. This decision may have been influenced also by the fact that Archbishop Walsh had made it known that he did not wish to be buried in the crypt. The marble cap-stones over the four archbishops' graves, however, were removed and these are still in storage. At a later date a mural table was erected in the main porch of the Cathedral, commemorating the four archbishops buried within its walls.

Education

One of Joseph Walsh's most spectacular achievements was his promotion of secondary schooling for so many towns and villages throughout the diocese.[121] Two of these schools at Claremorris in 1945 and in Ballyhaunis in 1961were directly established by him and staffed by his priests. However, his encouragement and enabling of so many religious-run co-educational schools was to be his lasting and most far-reaching contribution.

The normal pattern in the foundation of those schools was that a representative group of parishioners in a particular town initiated the process by asking that the archbishop would receive them as a delegation. They made a formal request that the archbishop would set up a Secondary school in the town. In those days the State did not directly provide second –level schools, except for a small number of Vocational Schools, which provided continuation education for just two years after Primary School. All other Secondary schools in the West were provided by religious orders and were principally staffed by religious. No State grants whatever were available for the construction of Secondary schools until after 1967. The archbishop always received the delegations with great courtesy and with an unerring instinct on whether or not the particular school could be a viable one. His own long experience in education stood to him well. The result of these delegations was that Dr Walsh was in the forefront in the whole Irish Church in

providing such schools, particularly Catholic co-educational schools and usually with great speed. The record in this respect was the provision of a Secondary school in Glenamaddy under the Sisters of Mercy just thirteen weeks after the date of the delegation in September 1959.

And so, with the enormous co-operation of the Religious Sisters in the diocese, especially the Mercy and Presentation Sisters, new secondary schools were set up during his episcopate at Claremorris, Louisburgh, Headford, Newport, Carna, Carraroe, Clifden (2), Glenamaddy, Ballyhaunis (2), Dunmore, Athenry, Mountbellew, Coolarne and Ballinafad. One lay-school school, provided by Mr Padraic Sweeney in Achill, received also his willing support. An indication of his remarkable achievement was that the number of boys and girls for whom it was possible to access secondary education rose from 969 on his accession in 1940 to 5,619 at the time that 'free education' and, crucially, capital funding for schools was introduced by the State in 1967.[122]

The End of the Dr Walsh Era

In his last Conferences in 1968 and 1969, the urgent matter of very low incomes of his clergy came up for discussion. On 5 February 1969, by which time he had knowledge that the appointment of a new archbishop was imminent, he spoke at length on this subject. He said it was time for lay people to take a more active part in the running of their parish. Some form of planned giving should be introduced to make a start at the levelling up of priests' incomes.

In spite of his natural reserve and his well-known idiosyncrasies, and despite his total opposition to his ever becoming a bishop, we can say that Dr Joseph Walsh, as archbishop, gave almost thirty years of great Christian witness and unrelenting and dedicated service to the diocese. His previous contribution in a leadership role in the diocese, as Diocesan Secretary and Vicar-General under Archbishop Gilmartin, stretched back a further twenty years. His character was enigmatic and complex but his deep faith and commitment to his vocation enabled him to enrich his diocese to an enormous degree. He took a direct part in every major project throughout the whole diocese. Every set of plans for every church and school were examined and commented on by him in their minutiae. The result of his work is to be seen in the enormous spate of church building and church renovation. The priests of the diocese, who knew him so well, constantly wondered, like the children before the village schoolmaster in Auburn, 'how one small head could carry all he knew'!

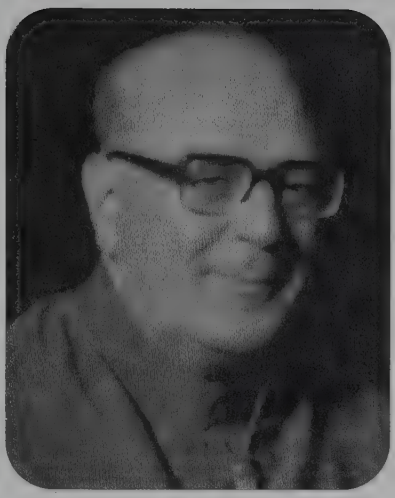
Only in retirement could he relax again and become a benign and humble character, which he really was. He lived out his final three years in a small house on Bishop's Street, which he called 'Shrine House' as it was said to be the site of the long-revered shrine of St Jarlath himself.

Speaking at his Funeral Mass on 23rd June 1972 his successor, Dr Cunnane, caught well the essential character and the notable achievements of Dr Walsh:

> The name of Archbishop Walsh will live in the history of the Archdiocese of Tuam as educationalist, as church-builder, as a scholar and as man of affairs. But what historians will never be able to re-capture are the qualities of that intensely live and lovable personality whom it has been our privilege to know. One word will always be associated with his name — that of 'friend'. Wherever I have gone at home or abroad during the three years since his retirement I have been asked the question, always in the same terms - 'How is my good friend, Archbishop Walsh? We were great friends.'
>
> That capacity for friendship was based, I think, on his quite extraordinary interest in people, in their problems, their worries, their most ordinary comings and goings. Though we did not realise it then, it was this interest in us that endeared him to us as boys in St. Jarlath's. This was the secret of that unbounded, almost tempestuous energy that in those days of his youthful vigour made him keep urging us on to greater efforts whether on playing-field or in classroom; just as it was it too that gave him that understanding and courtesy with us boys that promoted us from being the traditional – Mister – of the classroom to being Jim or Pat or Tom, in a word, to being a friend.
>
> One hesitates to use the word 'simple' of a man who was so utterly shrewd in his judgments, so intolerant of sham in any form: and yet Archbishop Walsh had an endearing simplicity in the best sense, that with his interest in people fitted him to be a friend - a friend not of any little group or coterie but a friend with everybody with whom he came in contact.
>
> With us his priests he combined kindness and approachability with exacting standards. He himself gave of his best in energy, in tireless work (he knew nothing of office hours) in painstaking attention to detail. He expected the same of his priests and was impatient if they failed to measure up to his expectations - impatient but never unkind, or if betrayed into unkindness, always ready to make amends at the first opportunity.

Dr Joseph Walsh had the unique distinction of having spent his entire priestly life, from his ordination in June 1914 to the day of his death on 20 June 1972, in the one single location, the town of Tuam, where he had served in St Jarlath's College, in the Cathedral Parish and as archbishop – a period of fifty-eight years. His death then was certainly the end of an era.

ARCHBISHOP JOSEPH CUNNANE, 1969-87



By 1969 Joseph Walsh had been at the centre of administration in the diocese, in one way or another, for forty-five years. He had been Archbishop for twenty-nine years, so that when he retired, only a few of the older parish priests in the diocese had worked under a different archbishop.

However as his time was coming to an end, the question of his successor began to be discussed. The last occasion at which a meeting of parish priests to propose candidates for the archiepiscopate had occurred had been way back in 1918. In 1969 consultation was confined merely to a routine three-yearly request by the reigning archbishop to a few of the canons of the Cathedral Chapter for suggested names. Formal meetings of priests to discuss such a matter were unheard of.

The fact that, at a time when Archbishop Walsh had such control over the diocese, the parish priests of the diocese did come together at Knock sometime in 1968, albeit very secretly, could only be explained by its having the benign approval, if not the unofficial instigation, of the Archbishop himself. Tuam priests are always wary that, as an archdiocese, Tuam is more prone to have an outside person appointed, usually by the transfer of an existing bishop. Rumours had been floating that some well-known bishop, or some non-diocesan in the ecclesiastical limelight, was likely to be appointed. This possibility must have seemed real for Archbishop Walsh as well as the priests and this would have been sufficient to unite the various elements.

A name frequently mentioned at the time was Monsignor Dominic Conway, Secretary-General of the Sacred Congregation of the Propagation of the Faith in Rome, who subsequently became Bishop of his native Elphin. There was also

serious talk of Bishop William Philbin of Down and Connor, a native of Kiltimagh, who had been transferred to Northern Ireland from Clonfert five years previously in a most unusual appointment. It had come about almost certainly as a result of the political influence of the then Taoiseach, Seán Lemass, who admired some progressive speeches made by Dr Philbin on Patriotism and Irish unity. Any Connacht-man was bound to have great difficulties in such a different milieu. Bishop Philbin had a summer-house in Claddaghduff, Connemara, and might be seen as having eyes on Tuam.

The Knock meeting was under the guise of a routine School Managers' Meeting, at which all parish priests and administrators would be present. Only a few of the senior curates in those days had responsibility as managers of schools. The meeting at Knock dealt first with the school business. Afterwards curates and administrators, except for the Administrators of the mensal parishes of Tuam and Westport, were asked to withdraw. However, after some discussion, administrators acting in place of parish priests were allowed to remain.

All participants in that meeting are now deceased, so accounts of the meeting are second-hand. The second part of the meeting was chaired by Archdeacon William Nohilly and the matter of the episcopal succession was introduced. Archdeacon Nohilly was well known to be very close to the Archbishop and his taking such a prominent role is a further pointer that the meeting had the benign approval of Joseph Walsh.

The possibility of an outside bishop being appointed was a matter of real concern and while no vote was taken at the meeting, the one solid conviction was that there was no need whatever for any outside candidate to be contemplated.

From conversations among the diocesan priests over the years it can be said that, though no names were canvassed, there would have been different opinions on various people. Tuam was blessed at the time with several notable candidates, and no less than ten Doctors of Divinity among the diocesan presbyterate. What was the sense then in bringing in an outsider? Included among the candidates that would have been favoured by the group were: Monsignor Gerry Mitchell, Parish Priest of Ballinrobe and a former President of Maynooth; Canon Gerry Mc Garry, also of Maynooth and the founder and Editor of *The Furrow;* and Canon Conor Heaney, PP Athenry, a former President of St Jarlath's College. These, however, were then in their sixties and this might probably have been seen as a handicap.

Among the next age-group, then in their fifties, were two serious candidates: Dr Michael Mooney, then President of St Jarlath's College, and Dr Joseph Cunnane, a curate in Clifden. It can be reliably said that most PP's were agreed that one of these candidates should be appointed in preference to any outsider. Having reached such a consensus and having, it appears, the good-will of the then archbishop, they communicated their strong views to the Papal Nuncio. The letter was, apparently, signed by the Vicar-General, Monsignor Gerard Mitchell, and co-signed by each Canon of the Diocesan Chapter who was present.
Those who attended the meeting treated the matter almost as a Pontifical secret. Indeed, for many years afterwards, other priests in the diocese did not even know such a meeting had taken place.

The general perception throughout the diocese at the time was that Archbishop Walsh had expected, and would have favoured as his successor, Dr Michael Mooney. It appears that at one time he had proposed his name as an auxiliary bishop. On one occasion at least, Dr Walsh had appointed him to chair a Clergy Conference in Ballinrobe - an honour then the function of the archbishop alone. Dr Joseph Cunnane was then curate in Clifden, having previously taught in St Jarlath's College and served as curate in Balla from 1958-67. In 1958 he had been invited to give some clergy Retreats in the U.S. and at some time, prior to 1969, Archbishop Walsh offered to release him to head a seminary then being set up in the United States by Bishop Fulton Sheen. Dr Cunnane however, on the advice of some friends, had declined the offer. He had become very well known through the country because of diocesan Clergy Retreats in various dioceses, his writing in *The Furrow* and his various roles at conferences in Glenstal Abbey and for the *Christus Rex* organisation. He was also well-known to Cardinal William Conway, whom he had visited in Armagh occasionally with his life-long friend, Fr Thomas Dooley, a classmate of Cardinal Conway.

It can be said with some certainty that Dr Cunnane did indeed have an interest in the post and believed he would have much to contribute. St Paul, of course, says that he who desires to be a bishop 'desires a good thing'. Conversely, it could be said that a person who would recoil from the very thought of being a bishop could already be an indication that he is not suited for such a task. In any case, in 1969 the role of bishop was perceived as a signal honour for the person involved, rather than the burden and the great responsibility that it has become in later years.

Dr Walsh Resigns

Archbishop Walsh formally submitted his resignation to the then Nuncio as early

as 5th August 1967. This is now clear from documents in Tuam diocesan archives.[123] In a letter to the Nuncio of that date he pointed out that he was now 78 years of age, that Tuam was a very large diocese, and it was difficult for him to carry out all the work. His letter was acknowledged and, surprisingly, just one month later, on 6 September 1967, his request was granted. He was to be relieved of his post of Archbishop of Tuam and was immediately translated to the Titular see of Tubernuca, which '*pro hac vice',* had been made archiepiscopal. He was instructed that the acceptance of his resignation must be kept strictly confidential, under bond of secrecy, pending the nomination of his successor. Until that time he would continue to govern the diocese as he had done in the past.

The priests of the diocese, however, were totally unaware of these facts. The instruction to the archbishop was certainly kept confidential. Not one of the priests noticed anything different from before. Even today, forty years later, it will come as a surprise to those who remember these times that for over sixteen months, from September 1967 to February 1969, Joseph Walsh was not in fact any longer 'Archbishop of Tuam' but merely its administrator. Certainly throughout late 1967 and for the entirety of 1968 no priest in the diocese knew the archbishop had resigned, still less that his resignation had been accepted.

As time went by and no successor was appointed, Dr Walsh grew exasperated. It may have been the reason for his prompting the senior priests of the diocese to meet together about it. On 15 January 1968 he wrote to the Nuncio as follows:

> It is with regret that I trouble Your Excellency but I am in a difficulty.
>
> On 6th September a letter came to me accepting my resignation. I am of course continuing to govern the diocese, but I must confess that I am anxious to have a successor without undue delay. Just now I am drawing up the Letter to the Clergy, which gives dates of Conferences, Confirmations etc. This work is awkward as the arrangements may not be suitable to my successor.
>
> May I ask you then if it would be possible in a general way to say when I may expect to welcome a successor here.

He was to wait a further year until, eventually, on 31 January 1969, he was officially informed that he would, as already communicated to him, become Titular Archbishop of Tubernuca and that Dr Joseph Cunnane, Catholic Curate in Clifden, was to be the new Archbishop of Tuam — the first curate ever appointed

as Archbishop in Ireland. The matter was to be treated as a Pontifical Secret until the announcement was made public. On 2nd February, at the re-dedication of Kilmilkin Church, Leenane, Fr Joe Cunnane, who was the homilist on the occasion, quietly approached the archbishop to say the Nuncio had given him permission to 'inform' him of his pending appointment. Dr Walsh merely said 'I heard that' and proceeded to offer him his best wishes.

The surprise announcement of the double appointment was made on 11th February. There had been no intimation that any announcement was imminent and the fact that both announcements were made simultaneously was an added surprise. That there was no interregnum, as is normal, can be understood now in view of the fact that the interregnum had, in reality, lasted for over sixteen months.

Joseph Walsh would henceforth be officially Titular Archbishop of Tubernuca. He retired, to live a very quiet and happy life, appropriately, in Bishop St, Tuam, the first archbishop in Ireland to retire. He had worked his entire priestly life for fifty-eight years in the town of Tuam. He died in the Grove Hospital on 20 June 1972.

Dr Michael Mooney, the candidate whom some people had expected, accepted the appointment with great grace and remained a loyal confidant of the new archbishop. He was appointed Parish Priest of Clifden in 1971, and later, of Abbeyknockmoy and Athenry.

Archbishop Walsh with the new Archbishop, Dr Joseph Cunnane, after his episcopal ordination 17 March 1969. Kneeling is Canon Michael Mooney.

A New Broom

Archbishop Cunnane was ordained to the episcopate on St Patrick's Day 1969. He was to remain Archbishop for eighteen years. Joseph Cunnane had the enormous advantage over his predecessor in having wide pastoral experience as curate in the diocese, at Balla and Clifden. He had also taught in St Jarlath's College for sixteen years. He had been an exacting teacher of Irish in those years and it took some years in a parish before he mellowed in his nature. The Connemara clergy were always known for their comradeship and sense of brotherhood. This was engendered by many clergy meetings to discuss pastoral affairs and, not least, by regular meetings for a game of cards and general discussion. Dr Cunnane revelled in those gatherings and came to be more aware of the over-hierarchical nature of the church, which had extended also to the mindset of parish priests. He, apparently, resolved that he must never become isolated from hearing the truth in open discussion and that he would continue to value the views of other priests, no matter how young.

The first occasion he got to express his ideas on episcopal leadership was at the annual Retreat of the priests in June 1969. The Retreats were then held at St Jarlath's College. In his address he so emphasised the latent talents and energy of the priest, including young priests, that many older priests became alarmed and expressed this fear to him in private. At the second Retreat, a few weeks later, while he did tone down the radicalism of what he had to say, there was still no doubt that we were entering a new age of leadership and sense of team-work where the Bishop, or the Parish Priest, was not to be presumed to have all the wisdom.

He believed he had much to offer the diocese and, in the spirit of Vatican Two, he began with a sense of purpose and challenge. Two setbacks early in his episcopate did diminish his self-confidence, however. One was in connection with one unwise appointment to a sensitive position, which gave rise to some controversy. The other experience involved a well-prepared address by the archbishop criticising governments for neglect of the West, delivered at a function in Breaffy House Hotel, in the presence of the then Taoiseach, Jack Lynch. The fact that the Taoiseach suddenly became unwell on the night and was brought to hospital had also a chastening effect on the confidence and spirit of endeavour of the new archbishop.

The 'Council of Priests'

Nonetheless, the advent of Dr Cunnane clearly led to a sea-change in the

government of the diocese. This is apparent from the Minutes of the early conferences and especially in the development of the new Church structure, the 'Senate', or 'Council' of Priests. The Council of Priests, which was initiated in 1970, had most of its members elected by the priests themselves. Its term of office was for a three-year period and it gradually came to replace the Cathedral Chapter as the main advisory body of the archbishop. Even in its early days, an attempt was made to encourage open debate and to reflect various age-groupings in the diocese. In order that this should happen, Archbishop Cunnane decided he would not normally attend the meetings during the early years but would be guided strongly by its views. He was well aware of the intimidating effect of rank and age in the culture of the times. The priests, especially older ones, were to find out, sometimes painfully, that pastoral inventiveness or effectiveness was not exclusively confined to those of age or rank. Their apprehension was, however, understandable. Many of these priests had gone through times of great personal hardship in the past, in some cases even in a state of real penury. Now they wondered was their position as parish priests also to be threatened.

The very sensitive matter of introducing a suitable system of retirement for aged parish priests was to occupy a great deal of attention from Archbishop Cunnane, as well as discussion in the diocesan senate of priests. There had never been any financial provision for retirement, and older priests naturally felt very insecure at the prospect of such a change. General Church Law had by 1973 required priests to offer their resignation at the age of 75, but a bishop was often under a subtle pressure not to accept the offer. The result was that, as life expectancy increased, and priests still not retiring, the age of appointment of a new Parish Priest extended to the rather extreme limit of 67 or 68. The number of priests retired in 1970 was three, only rising to the more normal number of 10 by 1977. However most of the latter continued to remain at that time in the parochial houses, a practice that was to continue until the 1990's.

The first 'Senate' meeting was held on 23rd February 1970 and it first chairman was Canon Conor Heaney, its first Secretary being Fr Michael Moran. As its Minutes were circulated to every priest in the diocese, the wide-ranging views and sense of collective responsibility apparent in the discussion began to herald a new era in style of church government, when compared with the rather stilted and well-behaved discourses apparent at the Clergy Conferences of old. In facilitating this change of mind-set, Archbishop Cunnane was ahead of his time.

An attempt was made to counteract the preponderance of the older groups, as

representing the deaneries, by the appointment of four curates and a representative of teaching priests. Later a Constitution was approved to improve this balance. One of the Senate's earliest pre-occupations was to procure proper funding to make retirement a real prospect for very old priests. It was soon seen that such a fund would have to be discussed in conjunction with a total review of priests' salaries, which had fallen very much in terms of inflation and were by then woefully inadequate. Deanery Meetings in 1968 had disclosed that several priests were receiving less than £550 per annum at a time when a twenty-year old Gárda, after six months of training, was receiving up to £1,000 p.a. Indeed, Gardaí were not particularly well paid at that time either. As an emergency measure, a voluntary contribution was requested from every priest so that all might be brought up to at least £800 annual income.

It was, of course an appalling situation, so Archbishop Cunnane formally asked the first Senate of Priests to investigate the matter of a proper priest's income scheme as a matter of urgency and to make proposals to him. The most obvious defect in the existing system was the wide variation in incomes between parishes and the anomalous division of revenue received within a parish. A parish priest had a right to an amount double the salary of a curate. This ratio system was a dis-incentive for any parish priest to tackle the wider, more difficult matter of total parish income as seriously as he should. The Senate confronted the problem and came up with very guarded changes. The archbishop made a temporary improvement on the existing scheme a ratio of 1.45 to 1 in favour of the parish priest rather than 2:1., but this was only pending the introduction of a fully-revised scheme.

The final rationalisation of the income scheme, several times refined and adjusted, and eventually recommended by the Senate, was placed before the priests of the diocese in 1978. The resulting vote showed 146 priests in favour but 44 were opposed and there were19 abstentions. The Senate recommended the scheme to the archbishop, with a proviso 'trusting that he will carry out his own consultations and amendments, in view of the percentage who did not accept it'.[124] A delegation conveyed the proposal to the archbishop three days later, on 25 October 1978. It was to prove to be the most difficult and important decision Dr Cunnane had to take as archbishop. He was well aware that older priests, who had lived for long periods in their curacy days in perpetual debt, were now averse to a change that would impact mostly on them.

That the scheme, in its essence, has endured for almost thirty years is a tribute to the work of the first three Senates and to the archbishop. In brief, an equal basic, if still modest, salary was guaranteed to every priest, no matter what parish he worked in. He also received a token allowance per year of service. A bonus of just £600 was granted to each parish priest. Some small allowances were allowed from parish funds and a house-keeper's salary was catered for. A central committee was formed and all moneys received in parishes in excess of the salaries allowed were passed over to a central fund to help priests in poorer parishes.

No other reform did more to create a sense of justice and teamwork among the priests. The salary scheme however, took almost six years to finalise. It came into operation fully from Christmas of 1978. Included was an inbuilt mechanism for yearly review and up-grading. In years of rapid inflation this was to prove essential and, by 1984, the fixed basic salary had moved to £4,300 from a base-figure of £2,500 in 1979.

Reforms

The Senate also took on the urgency of providing facilities for youth. Priests were encouraged to organise youth clubs for them, particularly under *Macra Na Tuaithe,* nowadays called *Foróige.* The Senate tried to address such glaring social problems as loss of population and lack of employment. Also on many Council agendas was the matter of Adult Education. As a result, a group called the Social Apostolate was formed and initiated widespread programmes of adult education sessions throughout the diocese.

It was a time of enormous change. The reforms introduced by the Second Vatican Council were very much the concern of the new archbishop. Only in October 1969 was the *Missa Normativa* introduced – the Mass as we know it nowadays. Con-celebration was now permitted and the new Rite of Baptism and the new Holy Week ceremonies were introduced from the early seventies. The age-old system of having 'village collectors' for the priests' dues was abolished and envelopes for priests' collections were issued from Easter of 1970. Tentative moves were made in 1973 to explore the possibility of receiving Holy Communion in the hand and having lay ministers of the Eucharist. Only by 1979, and the Papal Mass in Knock, did the latter become a reality and was, at first, confined to religious Brothers and Sisters. Confirmation, which had been administered only every four years in rural parishes, would now take place every two years, effectively delaying Confirmation until a boy or girl was in fifth or

sixth class. The Catholic Marriage Advisory Council (later ACCORD) was introduced, and for the first time, lay people addressed a clergy Conference in October 1973. The introduction of Schools Boards of Management in 1975 heralded a new age of co-operation between priests and people in the management of a vital part of parish life. The emphasis on the homily, rather than the traditional sermon, caused much discussion and fears that homilies on the Sunday readings would leave great areas of Catholic instruction untouched.

Dr Cunnane was the first Archbishop of Tuam to drive his own car and, as a result, he had the facility to visit priests and parishes more easily. He was a regular, though informal, visitor to schools all around the diocese. He preferred that sense of informality to one of decorum and distance. He recalled one personal memory of this tension: his first visit, on a routine matter or some personal business, to a bank in Tuam. As it was so unusual for an archbishop to drop in, his visit caused such a flurry among the staff that he gave up the practice. Subsequently, he was to regret that he did not go in again the following day and make such visits matter-of-fact events. Bishops have isolation forced on them rather than their seeking it, and in spite of one's own wishes. He was to suffer almost the same distancing as his predecessors, although he made every effort to encourage informality with his priests and people and he did keep up his love for golf and a game of cards until his later years.

A special diocesan initiative introduced by Archbishop Cunnane was the Tuam Mission to Zambia. Several diocesan priests volunteered and were accepted as co-missionaries working in Zambia in conjunction with the SMA Fathers.

One of the quirks of Dr Cunnane's predecessor was his tendency to appoint temporary Administrators in certain parishes rather than parish priests. Some of these parishes had a succession of administrators lasting more than a decade. Administrators were appointed often to parishes where there was an ailing parish priest, or where the archbishop favoured the energy of a younger man to undertake some major projects. This policy was reversed by the new archbishop who, immediately after his appointment began to appoint parish priests in place of Administrators.

One of the parishes concerned was Knock where no Parish Priest had been appointed since the death of Canon Grealy in 1946. Dr Cunnane determined that Fr James Horan, the administrator since 1967, would remain in Knock and, when

his time for appointment came up for appointment as a parish priest Dr Cunnane appointed him as its as Parish Priest in 1973. As archbishop, Joseph Cunnane had a much finer appreciation of the necessity of 'hands-off control' of individual parishes, including Knock. In no case was his encouragement of the initiative of a parish priest to have a more fruitful result than in the case of Fr James Horan who, because of the freedom he was allowed, transformed Knock in the decade before the Papal Visit in 1979.

Pope John Paul greeted by Monsignor Horan on Knock, 30 September 1979.

Dr Cunnane's relations with his native parish of Knock and the new Parish Priest made life a little more difficult for the lay people, particularly Mrs. Judy Coyne, the Secretary of Knock Shrine Society. She did not have as easy an access to the archbishop as she had enjoyed during the tenure of Archbishops Gilmartin and Walsh. However, she persisted loyally and trenchantly in her endeavours. A particular victory for her was the installation of the Knock Apparition tableau in the Shrine Chapel, in time for it to be blessed by Pope John Paul on the occasion of his visit to Knock in 1979. The statues forming the present tableau had been stored in boxes in out-offices for more than sixteen years, awaiting some decision on their location.[125]

The Bundoran Assembly

In early 1982, the Council of Priests began to explore the possibility of a Diocesan Assembly. Its purpose was to identify the important areas of pastoral work requiring special attention and generally to shape the future of the diocese over the coming five to ten years. It was decided that, on this occasion, the Assembly would be confined to the priests. However a full programme of consultation with religious and laity would precede it. The Assembly was to meet in Bundoran from Sunday 23rd October 1983 until the following Saturday. Only two or three priests, mostly elderly priests, would remain in each deanery. There would be no morning Masses, Stations or parish meetings held within these dates, and no marriages were to be booked. It was therefore a first for the archdiocese of Tuam.

The Assembly would follow a format found useful by many religious orders and dioceses, such as Armagh and Kerry. The method followed would be the 'Berger method', which adopted an approach called 'prospective thinking', in the belief the future was still open and the diocese could determine it to some extent at least. The facilitator would be Fr Seán Dunne, O Carm, PP, who had already conducted a similar assembly in the archdiocese of Armagh. The method would draw from the priests themselves rather than a concentration on input from without.

There was genuine enthusiasm for the project and the very experience of having well over one hundred and fifty, or ninety per cent, of the priests of the diocese present in one venue for almost a whole week was completely without precedent in the history of the diocese. The days of discussion followed a broad outline, first of critical examination of the present situation, then of 'dreaming' of an ideal diocese in 1993, ten years hence and, lastly, detailed practical planning to make the vision practical.

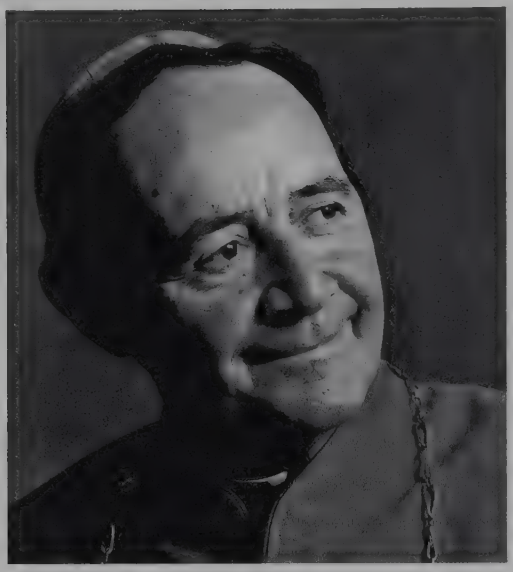
'Vocal minorities' would be curtailed in any attempt to monopolise the assembly. Therefore, on the very first day, the audience heard the opinions of every priest of the diocese without comment or discussion. These views were read from index cards, under various headings, outlining positives and negatives of current practice. There were no holds barred and all and sundry could hear of some criticism or praise. Archbishop Cunnane, parish priests and curates heard matters of criticism with equanimity. It was a positive day and alerted minds for the days of visioning ahead. This second phase was the part found to be the most difficult. The Church's business is to conserve doctrine and morals, and priests were not familiar with such a process as dreaming an ideal future. It involved much drafting and revising of documents from various study groups and long typing into the night. Perhaps the invitation to dream was unclear in that it did not identify any parameters and one could easily be tempted to re-invent the wheel! This lack of clarity made the last days of planning somewhat frustrating and, particularly, it was to transpire that the setting of target-dates for various schemes to be implemented was to prove unrealistic. In all this process, the openness of Archbishop Cunnane to change was a very positive force.

The Bundoran document of fifty pages, drafted in some haste and in the heady atmosphere of the Assembly, is an interesting snap-shot of the mood of an Irish diocese of 1983. The total exercise, despite its failure in detailed implementation, was a major loosening-up process in the development of the diocesan clergy and

their acceptance that the diocese of 1983, twenty years after Vatican Two, was still working on an inadequate model of church, where the laity did not feel themselves to have a real part. At a time of an abundance of priests, the part of the laity seemed less urgent.

Joseph Cunnane always remained a shy individual. As a teacher he was remembered for his efficiency but also for his exacting standards and strictness. As archbishop, he made every effort to deal with this reputation and, in the course of the years, he mellowed in many ways. On St Stephen's Day in 1984 he suffered a brain haemorrhage and almost died. But he was back to work within a month. However, he was in the early stages of Parkinson's disease and realised that he could not continue until the normal retirement age of seventy-five. He worked incessantly, however, for his remaining three years as archbishop.

When, eventually, he was relieved of his responsibilities in late 1987, he moved to Knock and undertook the work of an assistant priest at the Shrine, celebrating a public Mass and hearing Confessions daily. He also continued to celebrate the Sacrament of Confirmation in various parishes, assisting his successor whenever called upon to do so. Even when he became confined to a motorised wheel-chair, he made his way regularly, down the hill, to the Reconciliation Chapel in Knock for his daily roster of Confessions. However, when his ailment became worse, he moved to the Grove Hospital in Tuam and was to remain there, as its longest-stay resident. On the announcement of the closure of that hospital, he was preparing to move to a Nursing Home, when he died on 8 March 2001. Dr Cunnane is buried, beside his predecessor, Dr Joseph Walsh, at the rear of the Cathedral in Tuam.



ARCHBISHOP JOSEPH CASSIDY, 1987-94

Archbishop Cunnane suffered a serious brain haemorrhage in late 1984. For a time he was near death but, thankfully, he regained his health and, despite some loss in mobility, was able to carry on. However, by 1986 priests of the diocese were becoming anxious about the succession and it was often a topic of discussion. This anxiety was increased because of some controversial appointments to the Irish hierarchy in the immediate past.

It is believed that Archbishop Cunnane had asked for an auxiliary bishop to help him and that he had hoped to that Monsignor Thomas Waldron, former President of St Jarlath's College, and later Administrator at the Cathedral might be appointed. Rome, however, was becoming averse to easy appointments of auxiliaries to ageing bishops. In any case it did not accede to his request. He therefore held back on the matter of offering his resignation.

As on many occasions in the past, the prospect of an 'outsider' bishop, or some well-placed candidate, being appointed to an archdiocese reared its head. One name being mentioned was that of Monsignor John Magee, Secretary to three Popes: Paul V1, John Paul I and, at that time, to Pope John Paul II.

In May 1986, an unofficial poll was carried out among the clergy of the diocese on a confidential basis, with a view to achieving a consensus and sending one name as a definite proposal to the Papal Nuncio. During the Spring of 1986 Archbishop Cunnane had also carried out his own routine consultation of priests, asking them to nominate any three priests suitable for the office of bishop anywhere in the province.

Because of the cumbersome and secretive nature of this formal process, the Tuam priests, conscious that a sudden appointment might come from outside the diocese without their expressing a final choice of their own, decided to initiate their own procedure.

Several meetings and two ballots followed, and the procedure was completed by 29th May 1986. Almost all the priests of the diocese had participated and the second and final ballot showed a result of 89 votes for Dr Enda McDonagh, and a total of 46 for two other diocesan priests, Monsignor Thomas Waldron and Fr Colm Kilcoyne. It was a two-thirds majority and could be counted almost as a diocesan consensus in favour of Fr Enda McDonagh.

Dr Enda McDonagh, although obviously trusted by the priests of his diocese, would not have been supported with equal enthusiasm by many of the Irish bishops. Despite his obvious talents, he had been passed over by the bishops, more than once, for the post of Vice-President of Maynooth College. Despite his prolific writing on theological and social matters and his great love and loyalty for the Church, it was believed that he was also somewhat out of favour in Roman circles.

Delegations of priests to the Papal Nuncios were almost unheard of then. However, a delegation of three priests from Tuam with Monsignor Michael Mooney as their chairman, was appointed and was received by the Papal Nuncio, Archbishop Gaetano Alibrandi, at the Nunciature, on 16 June 1896. They delivered a letter giving a description of the consultation procedure followed in the diocese and the name of Dr Enda McDonagh as the clear choice of the priests of the diocese.

In advancing the reasons for choice made by the priests, they argued as follows:

> In making their selection, the priests were conscious of the needs of the diocese and of the Irish Church. They were also conscious of the outstanding qualities of Dr. McDonagh. He is a theologian of international repute. He has a keen sense of the brotherhood of the priesthood. He is a man of great charity, tolerance and wide vision and he has maintained a close association with the priests and people of the diocese. It is considered that his many years as Professor in Maynooth and his contacts with the Church in Europe and in the United States have given him an opportunity to be aware of most recent pastoral developments in the Church. This would be a great advantage

> to him in motivating the priests and people in building up the Church of Christ in Tuam. It is also the belief of the priests that as a member of the Episcopal Conference he would have a special contribution to make to the Irish Church at the present time.

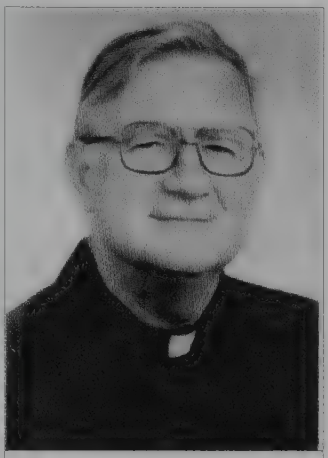
Before the letter was handed over, the delegation amplified on the general points in their letter. The Nuncio, however, responded that, at that time of course, there was still no vacancy in Tuam and despite the archbishop's earlier illness, he was in reasonably good health. When a vacancy would occur, the Nuncio would, as he did in so many other dioceses, carry out a full consultation of the priests and people but only when he was authorised to do so by the relevant Congregations in Rome. If there were a role for a delegation such as theirs then, he would let them know. When it came to appointing bishops in Ireland, the whole country was regarded as one region, as Italy was, and appointments were frequently made from any place within a particular region.

The interview lasted about half an hour and the discussion became informal and ranged over a number of current topics in the Irish Church. It had been decided that the substance of the letter to the Nuncio would be communicated to the four archbishops and to the Bishops of Galway, Clonfert, Elphin, Killala and Achonry. These all replied, expressing gratitude for the information supplied. Some commended the strict confidentiality achieved by the Tuam priests. The delegation itself did not have any special contact with Archbishop Cunnane but Monsignor Mooney, the leader of the delegation had, as a matter of courtesy, kept him informed privately.

The priests of Tuam had been extremely careful about confidentiality throughout the process but one of their number, in a letter to *The Sunday Press* on 29 June 1986, made a reference to the fact that their columnist, Fr Colm Kilcoyne, had come third in a recent poll in Tuam for the nomination as a successor to Dr Cunnane. The fact that a ballot had been held was then, regrettably, in the public forum. Such publicity was a grave disappointment to the priests of the diocese, after all the careful efforts they had made to have their views responsibly and calmly communicated and assessed by the authorities. The authorities could now regard the entire exercise as an unwanted intrusion into their affairs. Inevitably, other papers followed up on the story.

Archbishop Cunnane, believing that Dr McDonagh was not likely to be considered seriously by Rome, had hoped that Monsignor Thomas Waldron, if

not appointed to the then vacant diocese of Killala, might be appointed to Tuam. Both the Tuam candidates were lifetime friends and close associates. Whichever of them might have been appointed as archbishop would almost certainly have had the other as his closest advisor.



Dr Enda McDonagh

It is known that the Papal Nuncio, early in 1987, had under consideration that Dr Cunnane could be offered a co-adjutor archbishop with the right of succession, rather than an Auxiliary. Dr Cunnane did his best to counteract this measure. In early 1987, Bishop Joseph Cassidy of Clonfert became aware that he was being considered for such a post. Dr Cassidy, a native of Charlestown and a priest of Achonry diocese, had worked happily in Clonfert since his ordination in 1959 and had been incardinated in Clonfert in 1964. He had been Co-Adjutor to Bishop Ryan of Clonfert since 1979 and had become its bishop in 1982. He asked Cardinal Ó Fiaich to use his influence to allow him not to be appointed. He had always been grateful for the welcome he had received in Clonfert. Health-wise too, at that time, he did not feel well enough for any change.

Dr Cunnane's earnest hope at this stage was that Monsignor Tommy Waldron would be appointed as his successor and he did what was within his power to bring this about. According to Monsignor Mooney, who had been in constant communication with Archbishop Cunnane, the archbishop for this reason kept deferring his formal resignation until Easter 1987. His resignation was accepted on 18 June - much earlier than he had expected. Dr Cunnane was appointed Administrator of the diocese, pending the appointment of his successor. No date was given for the announcement of this. On contact with the Nuncio, Dr Cunnane was advised he could choose the date of the announcement. He chose Saturday 11th July.

The delegation of priests, which had visited the Papal Nuncio a year earlier, wrote to him again on 3 July 1987, again proposing the name of Dr Enda McDonagh. However, on this occasion, they also gave him the names of those who had been second and third in the Tuam ballot of 1986, namely Monsignor Thomas Waldron and Fr Colm Kilcoyne. Their last letter stated: 'In making this submission, we

express our total loyalty to you and to the Holy See and affirm our readiness to accept warmly whomsoever the Holy Father will, in his wisdom, appoint to the position'. The Nuncio, Dr Alibrandi, thanked the senders for their 'courteous letter'. Perhaps he could now feel that he had the space to carry through the intention the decision-makers had already intimated for several months past. Perhaps this is where the Holy Spirit entered in the process!

Cardinal Tomás Ó Fiaich, in a letter to the three Tuam delegated priests on 29th July 1987, indicated that he had not as yet been consulted formally about Tuam. Things apparently moved swiftly after this. At the end of July the Papal Nuncio carried out his formal written consultation of a small number of Tuam clergy. It would appear, from this and from an analysis of the dates of other communications, that the consultation exercise was no more than a formality because, on 20th August 1987, in the height of the Roman Summer, the Papal Bull appointing Dr Joseph Cassidy as Archbishop of Tuam was signed in Rome. He was to be the fiftieth archbishop of Tuam since the archdiocese was formed in 1152. Dr Enda McDonagh, the other main candidate, while always grateful for the support shown in him by the priests of the diocese, had always believed that he would not be seriously considered for the post. He was now relieved that he did not have to carry the burden of that office. He remained on as Professor of Moral Theology at Maynooth, became a prolific writer on theology with more than fifteen books to his name and, internationally, was to be known as Ireland's outstanding theologian.

The public announcement of Dr Cassidy's appointment took place on 3rd September 1987. It was, of course, no great surprise and was hailed by all who knew him. In Maynooth he had been a brilliant student and known as a great and warm character, an author of two plays and a gifted actor, a man of many talents, great wit and good humour, especially gifted in his communication skills. By now, he was well known throughout Ireland as the spokesman of the Irish Bishops' Conference, a job he performed with great proficiency, but which he often privately described as a 'crucifixion'.

Installation and Vision for the Diocese

The installation of Dr Joseph Cassidy as the 50th Archbishop of Tuam took place with due ceremony on 18th October 1987. In his address, the new archbishop dwelt on the great untapped resource in the Church, the vast body of the laity, 'the people of God', who must be called on to take a new and more direct responsibility in the building up of the Kingdom of God. Dr Cassidy was always an

inspiring preacher with an extraordinary gift for the telling phrase. His reference to this 'sleeping giant' within the Church was to be a focus for much of his pastoral endeavours in the years to come. Within one year he had assembled a diocesan assembly in Castlebar, representative of every parish and every church organisation, to debate the future of the diocese. It gave rise to what was later called 'the Council for the Laity', still an important force in the diocese.

Dr Cassidy very soon came to feel that he was indeed warmly welcomed as archbishop by the priests and laity of the archdiocese, despite the well-known facts of the unofficial interregnum just past. Archbishop Cunnane moved to Knock, where he helped at the Shrine, but he continued to be available to Dr Cassidy and undertook many Confirmations for him throughout the diocese for a number of years.

Clergy Conference Minutes show that Archbishop Cassidy had enormous energy and ideas. He set out on a mammoth task to celebrate Mass in all 138 churches in the diocese as soon as possible and meet and greet the people. All during the following winter he journeyed on his own for evening gatherings in various parishes. Sometimes he got lost but he kept going, concentrating on the parishes and half-parishes which would not have Confirmation for some time, or maybe never, in the future. He taught a short lesson in connection with Confirmation in every single one of the 195 Primary Schools in the diocese and visited every classroom. His easy graceful manner won him great esteem everywhere and indeed his approachability left him open to more invitations and so many more journeyings that would eventually take a toll on his health.

He issued a Family Prayer card for every house in the diocese, encouraged priests and people to join him in the Cathedral for Holy Thursday and certain other occasions. In short he did all he could to make the bishop more accessible to the people. He set up the Diocesan Family Centre in Castlebar and had priests trained abroad to direct its many programmes for the family.

Dr Cassidy's episcopal motto in his chosen logo was '*le caoineas Chríost*', 'with the compassion of Christ'. This he tried to implement in all his dealings with priests and people. Nevertheless he was a decisive person and did not shrink from taking difficult decisions when they were called for. In church administration, for instance, he moved to make compulsory in every parish, in the interests of uniformity and efficiency, the envelope system for church offerings, already in use in some parishes. He authorised the setting-up of Finance Committees in

every parish to oversee the accounts and to help generally with parish finances. He also encouraged the introduction of Parish Newsletters.

In the sensitive matter of priests' retirement he made a decision, after much consultation, that the offer of parish priests to retire on reaching the age of seventy-five would automatically be accepted, but they would be well catered for by being allowed certain options for their future. Each one could move to another parish as an Assistant or retire from parish ministry. A special retirement home was built in Tuam town near the Grove Hospital for any retired priests who would choose to live in Tuam.

He made the first moves towards the creation of Parish Pastoral Councils in every parish and the positive support of the Church for the developing of local radio. Now that local Radio was to become legalised, the diocese took shares in the two local radio stations, Mid-West FM and Galway Bay FM, in order to help these services to be set up. With the co-operation of his fellow–bishops in Clonfert, Achonry and Galway he set up the Western Theology Institute in Galway which, to this day, works in providing courses in theology in the western dioceses and in third-level institutions.

Dr Cassidy had a particular feel for the many people who still had to emigrate from the diocese and, like his predecessor, made many journeys to Britain to attend parish re-unions. A survey of fifty parishes conducted by the Council of Priests in 1989 found that 7,000 people from their parishes had emigrated between 1985 and 1989. With other bishops of the West, he set up a project called 'Developing the West Together', a project which received widespread support, analysis and discussion and, ultimately, was to have a major influence on Government thinking, leading to the creation of the Council for the West and the Department of Rural Affairs.

The Cathedral and Parish Churches

The simplification of the Cathedral sanctuary carried out in 1968/69 had catered for the changes in the Liturgy, but only to some extent. The huge East window had been revealed as it had not been since the 1830's, but this, itself, caused problems. Morning light in the Cathedral meant that the Celebrant facing the people could not be easily seen by the congregation. A Church artist, Ray Carroll, was commissioned to re-design the sanctuary in the light of new guidelines that were by then available. Dr Cassidy took a large share in this work, which was completed in 1992.

In his concern for public issues affecting his people, he was not slow to take a stand and to invite the relevant authorities to take a wider perspective than the mere economic. Two controversial issues particularly engaged him and on both he showed a level of courage more reminiscent of earlier times: the prospect of mining for gold on Croagh Patrick and the issue of compulsory licensing for boatmen and anglers on the western lakes. The latter led to what was called 'the Rod War'. On both issues, the general views he so potently expressed won the day.

In dealing with the parishes he liked to be kept informed of all parish projects and to keep a hands-on approach in any major endeavour. He took a special interest in plans to re-order churches and, in regard to Knock, he continued the work of his predecessors in making facilities available for pilgrims. Always on the move, he could never refuse any invitation, if he felt his presence could do anything to further a worthy cause.

Council of Priests

When Dr Cassidy came to Tuam the total number of priests working in the diocese was a comfortable 148. Nevertheless, the Council of Priests at that time had already recognised that, because of fewer vocations, the decline in priest numbers would continue and the diocese would not be able to maintain for much longer the high level of services provided. A radical re-examination had already begun on the deployment of its priests. Archbishop Cassidy valued the work that had already been carried out on that topic and soon became involved in long-term planning necessary to cope with an evolving situation. While the term 'consultors' as envisaged in Canon 502 of the Code of Canon Law would continue to refer to the Diocesan Chapter, he set up a new body, generally called by the same name, from the membership of the Council of Priests, to advise him on the matter of personnel, deployment and appointments. He would continue to take the final responsibility in making the decisions on all appointments.

The Council of Priests, with the archbishop's support, commissioned a Diocesan Directory, which was to become a useful tool in making people aware of the services offered by the diocese. The first issue was published in early 1990.

Retirement of Archbishop Cassidy

Such a hectic life-style could not continue. Even before he moved to Tuam, Archbishop Cassidy was conscious of health difficulties and at Christmas 1989 he had to undergo a heart by-pass operation. Very soon afterwards, however, he

began to suffer angina, which gradually got worse. Although further surgical and medical remedies were tried, the pain never went away for too long. He carried on his work as best he could, with the assistance, after 1991, of an auxiliary bishop, Dr Michael Neary, but the strain of being the person in charge was too much for him. Eventually, the strong medical advice was that he would have to find an easier way and, unless he could keep the demands of his job within his physical limitations, he would have to resign. Therefore, in February 1994, he formally requested Rome to be released from his responsibilities. He had then spent less than seven years as archbishop.

The resignation was accepted in the following July and the news created great sadness throughout the diocese and indeed throughout the country, especially in church circles. Even *The Irish Times* gave over half a page to the resignation of Archbishop Cassidy on 29 July 1994. It said he was one of the few Catholic bishops to learn how to use the media effectively as a skilled teacher, preacher and communicator. Cardinal Cahal Daly, in a tribute, said that only those close to Dr Cassidy knew of his struggle against ill-health and his virtually constant pain over the past seven years. The decision he said 'was taken after much prayer and reflection and was taken only because he felt he could no longer serve as effectively as he wished. No one else shared that opinion; but we must respect his decision and admire the high ideals of service which motivated it. His gifts of communication, his inimitable ways with language, his talent in sharing gospel truth in simple, yet striking and memorable phrases, with humour often breaking through, made him a teacher of unique quality and a media communicator of rare effectiveness'.

In a press conference after his resignation, Dr Cassidy revealed that the Holy See had offered him the choice of retiring immediately or of staying on as diocesan administrator until a successor had been appointed. He agreed to stay because there was a certain amount of work going on in the diocese that needed to be consolidated just then. He was to continue as Administrator therefore for another eight months and, thereafter, he intended to make himself available for pastoral work in the diocese.

When Dr Cassidy was eventually free to pursue that intention, the parish of Moore, a parish which reached to the banks of the Shannon, was due to become vacant. It is called an 'island parish', because it is geographically separated from the rest of the Tuam diocese. It was an ideal choice for the retiring archbishop.

Here Dr Cassidy could still remain at work within the archdiocese of Tuam, as he had asked, and still be near to the priests and people of the diocese of Clonfert where he had ministered for twenty-eight years, as priest and bishop, and share his tremendous gifts of nature and grace with the people of Moore. For a number of years he continued to do a small number of Confirmations in Tuam but, because of continuing health problems, he had to reduce his workload further. It did not, however, stop him from publishing two very well-received books of homilies which, characteristically, he entitled '*These Might Help*'.

ARCHBISHOP MICHAEL NEARY, 1995 -

Archbishop Cassidy had enormous energy, especially in his earlier years, and grew in popularity by the year in his time in Tuam. It was a great sadness in the archdiocese when illness forced him to seek early retirement from the office of archbishop on 28 June 1994. Indeed he had to ask for an auxiliary bishop in 1991, less than four years after his appointment.

When Archbishop Cassidy found that he was unable to carry out the work of Archbishop in such a huge diocese after his major surgery at Christmas 1989, he took the courageous step to write formally to every priest in the diocese on 26th November 1991, asking them to send him within seven days the names of three priests who, in their judgment, were suited to the position of auxiliary bishop. Each voter was left free to sign his 'votum' or leave it unsigned.

This action of the archbishop came from his own initiative rather than as a reponse to any request from the Papal Nuncio. Indeed, the new Nuncio, Dr Gerada, mildly suggested to the archbishop that he was 'doing his job for him!' Because the priests of the diocese had such trust in Archbishop Cassidy, this invitation had the effect of stilling any possible controversy among the priests of the diocese about possible contenders. There was no need for meetings or delegations as on former occasions, a few years earlier in 1986, or indeed in 1969. It was appreciated, in any case, that the appointment was that of an auxiliary bishop only, with no guarantee whatever that the one chosen might one day become archbishop. Indeed, in other dioceses, auxiliary bishops had frequently

been appointed from an older age-group, which lessened the likelihood of their ever becoming the bishop or archbishop.

If an older priest were to be considered, then the name of Monsignor Dominick Grealy of Knock Shrine, who was Vicar-General of the diocese, would naturally have been considered. The result of the vote, of course was kept secret but it can be said with some certainty that many of the priests favoured the appointment of a younger man. Dr Michael Neary, who was then Professor of Scripture in Maynooth received much support as did Monsignor Thomas Waldron, among others. Msgr Waldron, by then Parish Priest of Claremorris, had also been a prominent candidate in 1986 but it is believed that on this occasion he made it clear he did not wish to be considered. Fr Michael Neary had worked in the diocese as a young priest in St Jarlath's College and, as chaplain and teacher, in Secondary Schools both in Headford and Mountbellew. Having pursued post-graduate studies in Scripture and Theology in Rome he had been appointed Professor of New Testament in Maynooth. He always remained in close touch with the diocese and became known throughout Ireland as an author and lecturer at many clergy conferences. He also gave a number of retreats for diocesan priests throughout the country.

The Papal Nuncio, by letter, also carried out an official but random consultation among a small number of priests. Dr Neary was duly appointed as Titular Bishop of Quaestoriana and Auxiliary Bishop of Tuam and was ordained Bishop in Knock on 13 September 1992. He took up residence in Westport and shared the Confirmations work and other work with Archbishop Cassidy. He adopted as his motto '*Fidelis et Misericors*', 'faithful and compassionate'.

On medical advice, Archbishop Cassidy resigned from office in July 1994 but was appointed as Administrator of the archdiocese pending the appointment of his successor as Archbishop.

A New Archbishop

In late 1994, as had happened in Tuam many times previously, the prospect of a bishop or priest from outside the diocese being appointed as the new archbishop raised its head again. On this occasion, however, because of the presence in the diocese of an auxiliary bishop, the prospect of such an event happening did not cause the concern that it had in 1969, or in 1886-87. On this occasion the Papal Nuncio, Archbishop Gerada, did carry out a fairly extensive consultation of

priests and some laity in August 1994. The process of selection was to take a long time, however. Each person consulted had been warned he must give his vote in conscience, *coram Deo*, before God, and was not allowed to discuss the Nuncio's invitation or the vote with any other person. This injunction was, it appears, widely respected. From general conversation in the diocese however it was widely hoped that Bishop Michael Neary would indeed be chosen as the next archbishop.

When nothing was happening by the following Christmas, some of the priests felt a little concerned and the then Dean of the Chapter communicated this view to the Nuncio. He also wrote that Dr Neary was an eminently worthy and suitable candidate and was fully acceptable to the priests of the diocese. In such circumstances, there was no reason to contemplate another western bishop whose name was being mentioned at the time.

On 18 January 1995, it was announced that Dr Michael Neary, son of Nora and the late Thomas Neary of Blackfort, Castlebar, was to be the new Archbishop of Tuam. At forty-eight, he was the youngest archbishop to be appointed to Tuam since the legendary John McHale in 1834. He was the second native of Castlebar to be appointed Archbishop of Tuam in the twentieth century, the other being Dr Gilmartin (1918-39). His appointment was widely welcomed throughout the archdiocese where he had by now become well known to all the priests as a result of performing many Confirmation ceremonies and attending other functions. On his appointment, he acknowledged that it was a difficult time for the Church but he added 'we should not underestimate or exaggerate our problems. This is not the first time that the Church has faced into a headwind of hostility. I am grateful for the tremendous legacy of faith handed on to me by Archbishop Cassidy, Archbishop Cunnane and the priests and religious of the diocese. It will be my responsibility to nurture and build on that legacy'.[126]

Archbishop Michael Neary with his predecessors, Archbishops Joseph Cunnane and Joseph Cassidy.

He was installed on 5th March of that year. He began his ministry at a time of great soul-searching for the

Church. The whole of Ireland, in the previous three years, and the Church in particular, had been rocked with revelations of a number of serious scandals of child sexual abuse relating to many people, including Church personnel. Only two days before his installation a priest had been charged with this offence. It created a sense of gloom over many in the assembled congregation of priests and people present at the Installation. Dr Neary, himself, referred to this in the course of his inaugural address to his people. Having referred to general trends in disregard for Christian morality and the reality of temptation and sin, he tried to give a message of hope. The Church must always be 'an oasis of hope', he said. 'Recent scandals have caused us to concentrate in a morbidly introspective way on wounds rather than on the potential for good in others. While we apologise for misdemeanours of a tiny minority of the messengers, we make no apology for the message. As St Paul says: 'I am not ashamed of the Gospel'.[127]

Unfortunately it was to be a topic that was to absorb much of his time and energy, and one he had to return to a number of times, in his early years as archbishop, as the reality and enormity of the scandal was shockingly unfolded. The Church, and indeed the Health and Social Services were totally unprepared in how to deal with such revelations. All learned slowly how, secretly and insidiously, children were damaged. Though only a minority were involved, the Church, in particular suffered through constant battering in the media, so much so that so many Church pastors lost their confidence in providing the strong moral leadership that is always needed in all areas of life.

Dr Neary was archbishop for just five years of the old Millennium which is the span of this historical study. It is too early then to review his special contribution to the on-going work of building up the Kingdom of God in the archdiocese. Suffice it to say, at this stage, that his witness to the truth of the Gospel has been strong, yet humble and compassionate. By nature a delegator of responsibility, he has harnessed the rich resources of the personnel of the diocese, priests, religious and lay people. While strategies may change, the first task of the bishop will always be to bear witness to the immutable truths of the Gospel

As the Catechism of the Catholic Church defines the office:

> The bishops, as vicars and legates of Christ, govern the particular churches assigned to them by their counsels, exhortations and example but, over and above all that also by the authority and sacred power, which indeed they ought to exercise so as to edify, in the spirit of service which is that of their Master.[128]

Conclusion

For very different reasons, the accounts of the earliest and the latest of the sixteen archbishops, spanning three centuries, tend to be the briefest. The earlier ones, because so little is known of them and the later ones because they are still so well remembered and their lives are so still so well known.

Though the survey of our Church history is short, it still reveals that the Church has always had to struggle in its Mission. Misjudgments, mistakes, human frailties, moral faults, and even scandals did not begin with the twentieth century. There is an old Latin tag that is very true: '*ecclesia est semper reformanda*: the Church is always in need of reform.' Out of pain, suffering and death comes resurrection but, despite human insufficiency, the presence of the Holy Spirit in God's people is ever re-building the fabric.

Though the story has confined itself largely to the succeeding archbishops themselves, an insight into various eras and the lives of the ordinary people can be gained from the selection of anecdotes and personal testimonies revealed.

When one reviews the history of the archbishops of Tuam over a span of three hundred years, their appointments, their careers as bishops, one must be glad to record the untiring work of service they gave. They were very different in temperament, character and ability. They were, of course, creatures of their time but they were all, undoubtedly, committed to the sacred calling they shared.

With regard to the system of appointment of bishops, we can see that the process has changed considerably over the centuries. It is now, perhaps, more centralised and more secretive than ever it was. Priests and people of a diocese, in showing preference for the local candidate, as has happened so often in our story, can of course, be over pre-occupied by local issues. In the United States, for instance, diocesan bishops are frequently appointed from dioceses right across the continent. An external authority like the Holy See, when it looks at an Irish diocese, can be more objective than we are, and are consequently able to take a wider view of circumstances into account. This no doubt, is an enormous strength.

The Church is a guardian of revealed truth and has a divine mission, and therefore must not yield to every passing whim, or local opinion. Without wishing to argue for an open democracy, with all the concomitant extraneous pressures such a system could bring, one can still hope for the on-going development of a more consultative and transparent method of selection of its leaders.

The names of all the sixteen archbishops who were chosen for the task over these three centuries are worthy of being remembered. Each did his best, conscientiously and tirelessly, to advance the work of the Church. All, except two, are now gone from this world.

'In their descendants, there remains a rich inheritance, born of them'. (Sir.44: 10) May their souls rest in peace.

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